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PRESENT-DAY THOUGHTS

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

THE RECREATIONS OF A COUNTRY PARSON

LONDON
LONGMANS, GREEN, & CO.
1871.

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I.

THE DEPRECIATION OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."—HEB. x. 25.

ALL over this country, you may find here and there large buildings of peculiar appearance, not fitted nor intended to be used for secular or business purposes. There is a great number of them: some of them have been raised at great cost; and they would be of no use at all if all we had to do in this world were to get food to eat and raiment to wear and a home to live in for our children and ourselves. They are appointed, these buildings, for the public worship of God. It is intended that people should meet together in them for common prayer and praise: likewise to listen to exhortation spoken by men set apart and trained for that purpose. Such buildings, and the services conducted within them, are regarded as a needful part of the organisation of all religious communities. In this country, the meetings in these buildings are practically confined to one day of the week: and to a small portion even of that day. There

are a hundred and sixty-eight hours in the week : and those are regarded as very good church-goers who spend three of these hours in public worship,—that is to say, who go to church twice each Sunday.

Going at the appointed hour (which may be easily ascertained) into very many of these places set apart for public worship, you will find present in them a mere fraction of the number of people they could contain. And (what is a much more serious consideration) you will gradually come to know that a very large proportion of the population never enters any place of public worship at all ; or attends public worship very rarely and irregularly. Yet public worship is a thing which (to speak generally) concerns all men equally. If any man or woman ought to go to church, then every man and woman ought to go.

If it were only that individual places of worship were very frequently much more than half empty, this might show merely that there are too many of them. And no doubt, to some extent, this is so. For Christian people, though worshipping the same God, through the same Mediator, and by the same Blessed Spirit, have not been able to agree as to the way and fashion in which they shall worship. There are diverse ways of worshipping God : and people, long accustomed to one way, cannot bear another. In one church the ministers who conduct the worship wear black robes : in another white robes. In one church, the prayers which are to be said have

been agreed upon beforehand, and the minister reads them from a printed book: in another church you can never know beforehand exactly what the prayers are to be. And a very great man, who was also a very good man, said that he thought this difference so great a difference, that it made it impossible for those who preferred the one way to worship habitually with those who preferred the other. Then, even when people are agreed so far as to worship in precisely the same way, they sometimes cannot agree to worship in the same building because they think differently upon certain points: points not always quite insignificant, yet points which no rational being will say can affect a man's reception in the other world, or his faithfulness purity and kindness in this. Hence, separate places of worship are multiplied beyond the need for them. A well-informed writer has lately calculated that in this small country at least eight hundred could be well spared. There are too many churches, just as there are too many bakers, grocers, and drapers; and too many railway trains where there are competing lines. Look into the carriages of the railway train, and you will see that half the seats in them are empty. Each shop could easily do three times the business it gets to do. Each does only a fraction of the business it could do, and is willing to do. So with places of worship. They have outgrown the demand for them. It would be easy to point out parishes in which, if every man woman and child of the population were

in church at once, hundreds of seats would remain unoccupied.

But it is not an entire explanation of existing facts, to say that there are too many places of worship. There is something deeper amiss,—amiss, that is, if attendance on public ordinances be assumed to be a Christian duty; and a thing which, being worthily done, will do people good. Even if every soul were in church that ought to be, the places of worship in Scotland would not be full. But they are made, many of them, still emptier by the fact, that out of the three millions of this country, there are scores and scores of thousands who never attend public worship at all: and that of those who claim to be church-going people, a great many do not attend by any means regularly. There is a lapsed class, as it has been called, who do not attend on public ordinances because they do not think of religious duty at all: because, I venture not to say through whose fault, they have, though living in what we term a Christian land, sunk into utter heathenism and godlessness. There is a smaller class, just at the opposite end of the scale socially and intellectually, of persons who are irregular in attending church, and who in some cases have entirely ceased to attend church, because they have grown away from that kind of thing,—grown out of liking for it and sympathy with it;—because they have come to feel as if they were beyond the need of it,—that it is all very good and profitable for others, but not for such

as they. Now it is not to either of these classes of people that I desire to address myself this afternoon. I desire rather to speak to the large intermediate class, which includes Christian people who attend on public worship with all regularity; and which includes, too, those church-goers who are careless and irregular in attendance on public worship, just from lack of heart and interest in the whole thing: just because they do not enjoy being in church when they go, and do not feel as if they got any good by going. It seems as if the counsel in my text, which seems beyond all question to refer to the ordinary public services of religion, were specially addressed to such as neglected these through indifference. In the face of our Saviour's promise to be present wherever two or three should be gathered in His Name, there could hardly be, then, even in the most crotchety, any doubt as to the propriety and advantage of the duty: and in those days it is not likely that such considerations as the unpopularity of the preacher, or the introduction into worship of rites which some disliked, had yet come to have much influence. Let me then, with all kindness and faithfulness, say some words about this thing: about the duty, and the advantage, in the case of all save very exceptional people, of a regular attendance on the public worship of God.

This is a matter which I have always shrunk from preaching about. Except in a few sentences,

said some weeks since by way of supplement to a paper read by command of the Supreme Court of the Church, I never have spoken from the pulpit to enforce this duty. For I have always held, and often said, that the only legitimate and successful way of bringing people to church, is by attracting them thither; by interesting them in the worship and in the sermon. But, though I do not believe it is possible, with any satisfactory result, to scold people into coming to church; and though I see, with thankfulness, that a large part of this congregation is very regular in attendance on worship; yet I feel that it would be unfaithful to keep silence about a duty which some manifestly neglect; and I cannot but remark, with sorrow, that too many among us are grievously to blame here. I fear there are some among us who think of church as a boy thinks of school: it is a holiday to escape it, and they are glad of an excuse to do so. Now, my friends, we must understand one another here. You will not misinterpret me. There is a special hindrance to any preacher in speaking of this duty, in this: that while he may think he is actuated by pure zeal for God's worship, and by the honest desire to see those in whom he is deeply interested doing what is right and good for them, some may think he is actuated by selfish mortification that people are not more interested in his instructions; and fancy he is like an actor damped by empty benches, or a man in any vocation who feels

he is failing in it. In our places of worship, the service is so personal; so dependent on the individual who conducts it, and who can make it just what he pleases; that we can see here one source of that curious feeling, sometimes found in Scotland among the less educated, that it is doing a favour to the preacher to go and hear him preach: that it is, so to speak, patronising his place of business. You remember how when that great man Dr Chalmers built a church for the poor in Edinburgh, a poor beggar said he must go there a day to encourage him. And so, no doubt, the poor beggar would encourage the great man: though not at all in the way the beggar meant. So, no doubt, a hearty and zealous congregation can unspeakably cheer the heart and stimulate the energies and abilities of their minister; though not at all, I humbly trust, on the sordid principle which is level to the comprehension of sordid and suspicious natures. Now, for various reasons, I am not afraid of this misconception, here, where I have preached so long. I know you will believe that I speak to-day simply from a sense of duty, as one deeply feeling that as to God's worship we all come short: and that, by God's mercy, it may be good and helpful for us all, for once, quietly to think over this whole thing.

My dear friends, there is surely something wrong, somewhere, if God's public worship is very disagreeable to us: so that our attendance upon it is felt to be an irksome task. God forbid that it should be taken for

granted that where this is so, the fault lies of necessity with the congregation. Where this is so, even in exceptional cases, there is reason for most earnest searching of heart on the part of the minister: for the most careful review, on his part, of the fashion in which his public duty is done: for the most solemn examination, by him, whether there have been failure in labour and study; in the clear, manful, and kindly setting forth of God's truth; in the devout and wise conduct of that most solemn exercise of public prayer. In such a case, the preacher may well be led anxiously to consider whether he have in any good measure, whether he have at all, those gifts and that grace which may fit him for that office to which he may have wrongly fancied God called him. But in such a case, too, there is surely reason for self-examination on the part of the congregation, or of the individual worshippers. Are you going to church, looking for the right thing? When you are in church, do you wait upon ordinances in the right spirit? As public worship must be an everyday thing, conducted by a great number of ordinary men, it is perfectly plain that you go to church looking for the wrong thing, if you go there, expecting what you can get only from very exceptional men,—exceptionally eminent in strength, and insight, and freshness, and eloquence, and courage,—and very likely quite exceptional in the views of truth they hold. And as public worship must be joined in by all kinds of people; poor people, and plain people;

without much culture; yet with hearts which may be stricken with the sense of sin and feel their need of the Saviour, hearts which may be pierced through with sorrows and feel their need of the Blessed Comforter; and people, too, compelled to worship in plain places, which did not cost very much to build, and where worship must be kept up cheaply or not at all; it is plain you go to church expecting too much, if you look for it that in the building, the worship and the worshippers, there shall be nothing to jar upon refined susceptibilities,—upon the delicate sense of what is beautiful and fit in architecture, in music, in deportment. Worshipping with the multitude of your fellow-sinners and fellow-sufferers, you must make up your mind to worship at some little disadvantage in such things as these. Perhaps the disadvantage will be abundantly recompensed by something which will warm the heart as æsthetics never can. There may be, somewhere, such things as genteel churches, with genteel services, suited only for genteel people: but God forbid that the sacred buildings of the National Church should ever be anything other than the common meeting-places of rich and poor! And God help us poor Christians in Scotland, if we cannot worship worthily unless in Westminster or in Wells!

Then such as find they get no pleasure nor profit in church, ought to consider whether besides going there expecting what they are not likely to get, they are not also present there in a wrong spirit. You

remember how a great though eccentric genius, dead not many years, would not enter even into his closet to offer his solitary prayer, without vesting himself in a white robe. *That* was a fancy. But without any fancy, we know the garb in which sinners ought to worship God. We ought evermore to enter God's house, "clothed with humility." We cannot heartily wait upon ordinances in a critical spirit. Of course, I do not counsel impossibilities: you cannot help forming some estimate of what you hear in church as you do of what you hear elsewhere: but you know what I mean: do not indulge a captious, fault-finding spirit, that depreciates the doings of all except yourself. And beware, even more, of a cynical spirit; that is grimly amused by the little means that weigh with simple folk, to touch and impress. I do not counsel impossibilities here either; nor ask for the slightest tolerance for irreverent and vulgar clap-trap. I will admit, too, that both prayers and preaching may be really so very bad, that the entire service shall be simply distressing: and I hope for the day, anticipated by the best and wisest of our clergy, when the congregation shall not be so helplessly in the hands of the officiating minister for their common prayers, as they are now. But remembering all this, I say that if we heartily pray for God's blessing on our worship, and come in an earnest spirit, surely we shall seldom fail to get some good. Let us fix this in our minds, that we come to worship: to stir up the devotion and

the better longings of our hearts : to confess sin and ask pardon and grace from God, as those who believe that if we confess our sins He will forgive our sins, and that if we ask for pardon and grace, our asking them will bring them. And we do not look, in preaching, for more than to be stirred up by way of remembrance of what we well know ;—the elementary truths of repentance towards God and faith in Christ ; —the old story, always fresh if in any way worthily told, or the fault is our own. And I am constrained to say that the prayers and sermons I hear are generally so good, that it is the worshipper's own fault if he do not worship with profit. But if it be otherwise, then remember that few among us are restricted in their choice to a single place of worship. One good comes of our unhappy religious divisions ; that we may find diversity of gifts, and go where we find what reaches us and comes home to us and suits us. It is no one's duty to attend on ministrations which do not interest nor profit : after honest endeavour on the worshipper's part to find them and make them interesting and profitable. But if we find that God's worship is a weariness to us, unless it be put in the form of an intellectual treat, or an architectural treat, or a musical treat ; then, most assuredly, the fault is in ourselves : in our own utter lack of that real central thing, that spirit of true devotion, without which no enjoyment of architecture, music, or preaching, is any worship at all.

There are certain very simple and obvious truths, which yet some people most thoroughly forget, when they complain of finding public worship a weariness and an infliction: as though that were somebody else's fault. And one of these obvious truths is this: that if a man feels no real interest or pleasure in worshipping God elsewhere, he will not feel these either in worshipping God in church. If we do not like to enter into our closet and pray to God alone: if it be a mere heartless task to keep up God's worship in our family; what right have we to expect that we shall enjoy God's worship when assembled in His house? We have no right whatsoever. But we may perhaps fancy we are enjoying *that*, because of a certain pleasurable excitement in us from the presence of a multitude: because of attractive accessories about the worship, which please our taste, and touch our sensibilities. All the while, it is not that we are in the least degree interested or engrossed in the actual, essential worship. We are enjoying art: we are enjoying music: we are enjoying the marvellous beauty of the mere language of prayer: we are enjoying eloquence: there is no more of devotion in the case, than would be in a picture-gallery or in an opera-house or at a tragedy: There is no religion, no worship here: but a vague, composite exaltation or excitement, capable of being mistaken for such. My friends, I do not want to see our public worship made such, that it shall enable an undevout man to

fancy he is worshipping, and enjoying worship. It should rather make him feel that there is something wrong in him; something that must first be set right; before that occupation, so pleasant to truly converted and regenerated people, can be pleasant to him. It should rather make him feel himself an outsider meanwhile, with no part in the matter; that he may be constrained to earnestly seek that he be brought within the Fold. I say there is a peril in worship so beautiful, that every man will enjoy it though he have no religion in his heart. Such a worship is a powerful means of self-deception! It is fitted to enable a man to fancy that all is well with him; when in truth it is not so.

These things are true. I am constrained to say them because they are true. And perhaps you may give them the more serious consideration, because if I were swayed by likings rather than by convictions, I might point you in quite another way. I might restore this place, if I could, to the glory, without the error, of other days. I might provide here, if I could, a magnificent church, whose beauty would be a perpetual pleasure: a grand and imposing service; the noblest music; the sublimest prayer and praise. But if these outward inducements and attractions made some come here regularly who do not come now, or some feel a deeper interest in worship than they do now,—oh where would be the profit! Oh what real addition of true worship would there be! There

might be a great access of pleasurable emotion: a great increase of self-deception: a great gathering of those light and unstable souls that drift so readily away from the church of their fathers: but would there be any increase of that real worship in which the creature stands face to face with God Almighty;—in which we poor creatures go and ask for what we need, with that earnestness which brings it down? Let us ever look jealously upon that improvement, however great it may æsthetically be, which may help us to believe we are worshipping in spirit and in truth, when we are not doing so. I say not that such improvements should be rejected: but we must see to it that they do not mislead us: we must remember to what they might tend. Perhaps, perhaps,—God forbid it should be so,—this present longing for a more stately ritual, may be nothing better than the feeling of a generation in which the old devotion is dying out; and which seeks to stimulate by meretricious arts an excitement which may pass for devotion. Perhaps, God forbid it, it may signify that we shrink from coming into God's very Presence with nothing between; and would fain put something between us and Him,—beyond the mediation of our Redeemer! Perhaps our fathers, when they appointed our plain service,—holy psalm, humble prayer, God's Word read and preached,—were wiser than we. This much is certain: that in our public worship we have what was helpful and pleasant to better and more

earnest people: surely, my brethren, the fault is in ourselves, if it be not so to you and me!

How strange, surely, to many, all these things which good men have said, about "longing for the courts of the Lord:" desiring above all things to "dwell in the house of the Lord," and to "inquire in His temple!" How unreal, and out of all experience, must seem "How amiable are Thy tabernacles:" and "I have loved the habitation of Thy house:" and "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord!" Oh can it have been that God's house, then, was perfectly different from what the church is now! For they were so happy in it, these good people that are gone; and we are so tired! Oh for an outpouring upon our hearts of the Blessed Holy Spirit: Spirit of earnestness, of faith, of prayer! And then, there will be no more ready excuses, for keeping away from the Place, where we get so much good, and feel so peaceful and happy. Then, in the plain church, with its simple service, though there be little for sense, there will be much for the weary, sinful, sorrowful soul. Then, when the church-door is opened, on Lord's day or week-day, how happy and good to enter in! There will be a glory about the Place, where Christ is: a glory about the worship, on which God is looking down with pleased eye!

II.

THE LIVING DOG AND THE DEAD LION.

"For a living dog is better than a dead lion."—
ECCLES. ix. 4.

LIFE is a most wonderful thing. It is a far more wonderful thing than we commonly remember it to be. Any life is wonderful. It is wonderful, the life of a plant. You see it growing up: in so far a thing by itself, independent of things round; yet rooted to the earth, and fixed to it as if it were a part of it. Much more wonderful is it, when, through the gradations of nature, we arrive at that higher development of being that is no longer rooted to the earth, but can move of itself, having independent life, as an animal has.

Then we remember this great certainty: that though we can do many things, and are learning daily to do more, we cannot make or give life. We can fashion out a statue, that shall be like a man: that shall be far more beautiful and graceful than any man. But we cannot give the spark that shall make it live.

We have, probably, all of us, at some time thought a thought something like that in the text: the unutterable superiority of that which has life over that which has no life at all. Here is the impassable dividing-line of nature: that which parts between the living, and the lifeless. A thing with very little life,—that is just feebly holding on to life,—may grow great and strong: like the feeble spark that may increase into a great fire. But you can make nothing of the thing that has no life.

Here is the living dog. The man who wrote this text did not mean by the dog what we do: the tried, faithful friend and companion of man: honest, affectionate, true, brave: with nothing of double-facedness, with no mean ends to be gained by mean arts, with no tendency to silly vapouring about its own wisdom and importance: morally far better than very many men. *He* knew the dog only as a prowling beast: a wild beast, but the meanest and foulest of all wild beasts. And then, by the lion, the man who wrote my text meant something quite different from what we know the word to mean. He doubtless had in his mind the old ideas of courage and nobleness of nature: he thought of the king of beasts. He did not know that the lion is just a bigger cat; with all the meanness and slinkingness and cowardice of a cat; only with power to do more harm. *We* should not scruple to say that a living dog is better than a living lion. But we know what the writer of the text meant.

He meant that the meanest creature, with life in it, is better than the noblest with life gone from it:—gone for ever, as life seems to go when it goes. That is the idea: the inexpressible value of life; the unutterable, unfathomable difference between life and death, —between being alive, and being dead.

You know,—or favoured you are among mortal creatures if you do not know,—the awful separation that is made when life goes. Weak, weak indeed, perhaps, were those who died, in the last hours of life: but still they were here,—still they were with us. The face was more peaceful and beautiful, perhaps, when the last trouble of troublesome life had faded from it: but oh the awful gulf in that moment made! There has been no communication since then: not a word more. Nothing can reach the ear; nothing can catch the eye. The great Atlantic is a narrow brook, to the gulf between the dead and the living.

I have said these things by way of introduction: but the life of which I desire now to speak to you, as my subject to-day, is Spiritual Life: the new and better life of God's grace within the soul. I take for granted that there is nobody here who doubts that this is the only life that is really worth reckoning. He only truly lives who has "passed from death to life:" that is to say, who is a converted, regenerated man. Wanting this, we want the only life we can take with us into a better world: we want

the only life that can push us (in any right way) through our daily work, and make us able to stand against our daily temptations. If we have not been (what the New Testament calls) "quickened," then in God's account we are "dead in trespasses and sins."

Now what I wish to do by God's blessing (and I am not ashamed to say that I believe there is such a thing as God's blessing, and that we can do our work better by God's blessing):—what I wish to do, taking the principle in my text for a starting-point, is to show How invaluable a thing is even a little of this better life: How vast a difference it makes to have even a little of this better life: How God's grace in the soul, however weak, if we only have it at all, is better than all this world's best without it. And I say this is so for several reasons.

First: Because to have this better life, or to want it, just makes the difference between being right and being wrong.

Everybody knows that in this world, a hair's-breadth sometimes makes the difference between right and wrong: yet the difference between right and wrong is always a mighty difference. Most of all is that so here, when the question is Whether a man be right or wrong for eternity? Here, everything turns upon it. If we have the life of grace, we are saved. If we want the life of grace, we are not saved. The question here is of eternal life or death: and it must

be answered by Yes or No. It is not a matter of degree. Each one of us who has been offered Christ's salvation is either on the one side or the other side of the great separating line. We have either opened the door when Christ knocked at it, or not. We, in our foolishness and self-sufficiency, setting aside the plain teaching of God's Word, and mortally deceiving ourselves, may think the difference small: but, believe it, brethren, here are the great contrasts of the universe: here are life and death, blessing and cursing: here are heaven and hell!

These are things that need to be plainly said now. Of course, if we do not believe in them, let us say so: then let us throw our New Testaments into the fire, and range ourselves manfully with other unbelievers. But if these things are true, they are tremendously true: and we must look them in the face. I often think that in these last days, there are certain words of an ancient prophet, dead for many ages, that express the peculiar characteristic of much of our theology, and our religious thinking and feeling; and that set out a danger which we ought to guard against. Says the prophet Jeremiah, "They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace." Our tendency,—and God knows we are all to blame here,—is to take things easily: I do not mean in the sense of not being readily disquieted or flurried; but in the sense of shutting our eyes against solemn realities,—

and making our belief square with our wishes. All our surroundings are a temptation to this. We live in a well-settled country, and in a quiet mode of life: we have had no personal experience of wars, or political commotion: we have come to like a mild thoughtful literature, much of which might perish in more turbulent times: and so we affect a mild religious belief. We dwell on God's goodness, and the attractions of religion: we keep entire silence on certain doctrines which are written in every Christian creed: we think as little as may be of solemn and awful realities which we cannot put away by shutting our eyes against them. In fact, we have grown luxurious and self-indulgent: and we do not like that which painfully disquiets us, in theology or in anything else.

Now, this is not Christianity. We should all, perhaps, be pleased and thankful if it were possible to blot out of the New Testament certain words of our Saviour, which speak of everlasting punishment, of the outer darkness, of the fire which is never quenched, of the rich man in torment: but the words stand there. We do not pretend to know exactly what the words mean: but it is certain they mean something; something very awful; something into which human beings may go by rejecting the gospel salvation; something that makes this life, with all its commonplace work and care, a time of momentous decision for each of us. Now may God, of His great

mercy, lead each of us to decide rightly! Now may the Holy Spirit make each of us feel more deeply how bad sin is of which we naturally think so lightly: how needful, above all other needs, is salvation from sin: and so may He persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel! Well I know that these words, without His grace, will make no more impression upon any heart than a word to move a mountain: the most faithful preaching of the gospel, apart from the Blessed Spirit, may be just as useless, as that which holds back the simple tidings of salvation is sure to be. Yet surely it may be good for us to commune with our heart, in quiet hours alone: and ask, Have we done what these words mean? Have we any measure of the better life in us: anything that will really bear us up when we come to die and can have nothing else? God be thanked if we have. For the feeblest spark of the life of grace is worth infinitely more than all other possessions.

A second reason why this is so, is, Because this life of grace in us is the great impelling power to all that is good: the only such power that can be relied upon: the only thing that will keep us up to duty even when it is painful, and when there is nothing to be got by it in the way of worldly gain: the only thing that will make us strong enough to resist whatever temptations may come: the only spring of good conduct that will last, and not wear out with

advancing years. You have heard speak of the Moral Dynamic: well, here is the Moral Dynamic: the source and spring of everything good that man can ever do: the central force that shall make the whole machinery of our spiritual nature play as it ought to play. The man who has in him even a little of this life of grace, has in him a gentle, never-ceasing energy, tending with the unflagging power of gravitation, to what is good, true, kind, pure, disinterested, self-sacrificing! The man who lacks the life of grace may do almost all he does (to outward appearance) almost exactly as the other: but, setting aside meanwhile the question whether there be not something amiss about it all, the day will come, at least the day may come, that will beat him: the day of sudden strong temptation: or he will be broken down by the ceaseless gravitation of selfishness, self-seeking, self-conceit. Self, in the long run, will have its way, wherever the life of grace is lacking. Self will be the great moving force, wherever God's grace is not so.

Now let us look at this again. I wish that I could say it as clearly as I see it.

Think: What makes the body move and act? Well, bodily life. I use words in their first intentions. What makes the soul move and act? Well, the soul's life. But that is not necessarily what we mean by moral or spiritual life. There may be intellectual life without moral or spiritual: there may

be many strong impulses in us to action: there may be even some moral discernment of good and evil, and tendency to do good rather than evil: but the only thing which, in the soul, always tends to what is good, and never to anything else,—always tends to whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report,—is moral and spiritual life, quickened in the soul by the Holy Spirit of God. We cannot depend on anything else, if it be tried hard enough: we cannot depend on anything else to wear, and never wear out. You can never be sure of a man,—of what he may yet come to do,—unless you are sure of his religious principle. There may be in him great amiability and natural morality; and these backed up by the strongest outward restraints from his place in life; yet all may break down when temptation comes. The spark of God's grace; the better life of the Spirit in us; is the only thing that will make sure of successfully withstanding the hour of temptation: the only thing that will make us truly reach after a goodness towards which self and self-seeking could never lead,—even that thorough goodness, genuine from its first spring onwards, that will bear God's eye, and come up to His mark.

Let me go back on this in just a sentence. Here is the soul of any one of us: here is the machinery: what is there that shall set it in motion? Well, there are in us various powers, various impulsory springs, which, being touched by things without us, will push

us on to conduct. But none of these, nor all of them together, can be depended on to push us on always to what is right, and pure, and self-denying; and to keep us right to the end in spite of temptation, and of our natural selfishness. God's grace in the soul is the only impelling power to all good. *That* is the better life in us, always urging on to all good; and lasting for ever. Oh how infinite the difference between the soul that has this spiritual life in even the humblest measure, and the soul that has no such life at all!

A third reason why this is so, is, Because life, however little, may grow so great: whereas what has no life can never grow greater than it is.

Of course, every one knows that when life is once started, is once there, it is not a thing to stand still, and keep on in the same way: it is a germ to grow. There is life in the grain of mustard-seed: and so it does not abide as the little grain: Give it a fair chance, and it grows into a tree. There is life in the acorn, that you can hide in your hand: Give it the right conditions, the earth, the air, the rain: and after hundreds of years, there is the great oak. There is life in the little helpless infant, that cannot speak, or walk, or understand anything: But give that little one fair play; and after years, it has grown into bodily, intellectual, moral strength and stature: the helpless thoughtless infant has turned into the strong, anxious, hard-working man. The change is great: in the main

it is for the better: yet something, too, is lost; something that was beautiful in its season, something that was very dear. We have all, perhaps, sometimes wished that things would stand still: that things grown out of, would come back: but that can never be. But if a thing have no life, there it is: and it comes to nothing more. The mountain: the sea: the ancient tower: abide the same. They will never surprise us by developing, of their own nature, into something quite different and far greater. There they are; and they remain. But if a thing have life, you cannot say what it may come to.

Now it is so with the life of grace in us: That principle, once implanted, will grow. And for this reason among others, the man with a very little of spiritual life in him is so inexpressibly superior to him who wants it; even if the balance in all other respects be in favour of him who wants it. No one in this world can understand; eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard it; whereto, in a better world, and a long eternity, the life of grace may grow. It doth not yet appear, either to others or to himself, what the regenerated soul may grow to, in goodness, and happiness,—even in knowledge and intellectual power. And the spiritual life, by the necessity of its nature, can develop only from what is good into what is better. No change can come here that would be sad to look at or think of: Nothing will ever be lost which we should have wished to keep. But the kind

heart that was so kind here, will grow always kinder in the Golden City: the pure soul always purer: and the strong and wise spirit that here often guided and sustained, oh how wise and mighty in the strength and wisdom of a better world! The life we know here,—all life but the life of God's grace, may develop either to good or to evil. The children must grow up: but they may turn out well or turn out ill. Day by day the heart-broken parent may see traits and features of character appearing, concerning which he wonders from whence they came: Could that heartlessness and selfishness and depravity indeed have been all latent in the little heart when the little face smiled from its cradle;—when the little feet took the first steps of all the many that have led so wretchedly astray! But it never can be so with the life of grace: There is nothing evil in *that* to be brought out: weak and unworthy as may be the believing heart in which God's Spirit implanted it, the spark of spiritual life is divine and faultless: and its necessary and irresistible growth, when you take it away from the unfriendly surroundings that in this world stunt and repress it, is only from good and happy to happier and better.

Now here is a great encouragement. Here is a very hopeful thought. That once the spark of the better life is there, it is not merely unquenchable, but by and bye it will grow infinitely brighter. For let it be said, with shame and sorrow, it would need. Truly

the life of grace, though it be an immortal germ in every heart that has it, often makes but a sorry figure here: its vitality is weak and cold; and its manifestations very imperfect. The life of grace, though this immortal germ, and sure to vanquish at the last, may be, amid the unhallowed impulses of the soul, no more than a feeble influence cowed by a turbulent mob of stronger influences: The life of grace in the heart may be as a handful of good wheat, almost choked by the ugly weeds that spring up around it. Less figuratively, grace in the heart, the real root of the matter in a man, may co-exist with so much remaining corruption, so many unamiable features of character, so many unworthy littlenesses, so many unmortified bad tempers and affections, that it is hard to love the unlovely Christian in whom all these abide together. But then remember, all these bad things will yet die out: the central good thing will alone live and grow. Everything else in the soul is doomed, in its time, to die: the life of grace will live for ever. It is always impressive to point out a survivor: the last to live among many. Of course, we can do this only after the event: the last survivor of any company of men becomes known to us only when all the rest are dead. It would be strange, if some one here now could show us the person who is to be the last survivor of this congregation; the one here to-day who will be living when all the rest are gone. It would not, perhaps, be the strongest-looking or the likeliest. So it is, surely,

with the converted soul. Other things in *it* may meanwhile be strong, and masterful. But if the man be indeed converted and regenerated, we know which of all the powers of his soul will be the last survivor. It will be the life of grace; the impulse to what is good and true. *That* may be weak now; but it will grow mighty. *That* may seem dying-like now; but it is immortal. Ages hence, in the better country, there will not be left in the blessed soul a trace of anything that used here to be unworthy and mean and evil: *That* will have vanished utterly. But all the good in it, which was here so weak, shall have blossomed into full luxuriance; into holiness and happiness that in this world were never known! Often-times here we have thought that what lasts longest, is best. Blessed be God's name, it is that in us which is best, that lasts longest.

My friends, those of us who have this better life of the Holy Spirit, and those who have it not, may now seem to be going on side by side, keeping close together. But, indeed, it is not so. For they are on different tracks; and the tracks are diverging, surely if slowly; and they will yet come to be tremendously far apart! Let each just go on in the way before him, the converted and the unconverted: and by and bye they will be divided by a *great gulf;* Christ himself said so! They are sad, indeed, the estrangements that arise in this world, when the little rift of

some petty misapprehension sometimes grows into a great separation, never to be got over: but there never was division like that between spiritual life and spiritual death, with all that must come of it here and hereafter! Sharp little pangs come to you, sometimes, when you discern that you and some one very near you are in truth not so near; that there are great differences going down to the very foundations; that the nearness is on the surface and the distance is vital. Now shall we make up our minds that the great gulf of this universe shall some day divide our families, our households, our friends, those whom we call our fellow-Christians? If that is to be, then all this life has been the blankest and most dismal of failures. Nor can any feel as though to have secured his own salvation were sufficient. Being such as we are, we cannot meantime see, how even looking forth from the golden barriers of heaven, it should be otherwise than with bitter tears and a woeful heart for some never to come There. Dear friends, united now by many kindly ties, oh let us hold together, here and hereafter! We cannot, if we have this better life, and are going on in this better way, turn into the other: but we can cry aloud to all we know, Come over and go with us, Come over and gladden us, Come over and help us! For indeed "we are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: Come with us, and we will do you good;" and you will do us good too. So shall we all be "joined to

all the living:" so shall "our souls be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord our God!" "And this is life eternal, that we might know Thee the only true God; and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent!"

III.

THE PLACE OF RITUAL.

"I have set my affection to the house of my God."—
1 CHRON. xxix. 3.

IT is well known to all who are interested in the Church of Scotland, that for several years past there has existed a strong desire in many of her members and ministers, both for more solemn and decorous places of worship than have hitherto been common in this country, and likewise for greater propriety and dignity in the forms and arrangements of the worship itself. The rude and ugly buildings which since the Reformation have generally been thought good enough to serve as churches, are being slowly superseded by others with some pretensions to architectural grace and beauty, though still sadly inferior to the churches of the Middle Ages. For doubtless there even yet, in many cases, rests upon Scotch church-architecture the blight which comes through the desire to grasp at the greatest possible appearance at the smallest possible cost. They did not set themselves, the men that built our cathedrals,

to the solution of that sorry problem. Yet let us be thankful for the improvement we have attained; and take it as the earnest of still better things. Then, besides the change in the outward aspect of many of our churches, there are changes for the better in our worship. There is a greater reverence in God's house. No one but the most ignorant will now enter that holy place unless with uncovered head. In many churches the congregation, instead of irreverently rushing out the instant the Blessing is pronounced, as though eager to escape from imprisonment, pauses solemnly for a little moment to ask God's grace in silent prayer. The like, too, at entering church; and I suppose we are all agreed that many earnest though short prayers for a blessing upon our worship will not go for nothing. In singing God's praises, the natural and becoming attitude of standing is supplanting the unmeaning and irreverent posture of sitting, which I never heard any human being defend, unless by the very bad argument that the ugly custom is an old one. In prayer, likewise, instead of that protracted and wearisome standing, which commonly passes into lounging or fidgeting, and which commonly too goes with staring about and inattention and indevotion, you will find that fittest of all attitudes—the knee bowed unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; that attitude so expressive of due humility, so easy to maintain for any reasonable time, and which makes it so natural to withdraw our attention from things

around, and to concentrate all our thoughts upon the act of prayer. And for those distressing sounds, not in any way worthy to be called music, which are a grievous hindrance to many who are both cultivated and devout, and which excite the ridicule of the young and thoughtless, we often find a careful and decorous service of song, elevating and heart-warming, simple so that it may be joined in by all, keeping melodies familiar in Christian worship for hundreds of years; and helped, too, by that grand Instrument of music, that seems as though made only for sustaining sacred strains, and with which even the most unhappily constituted minds can have no associations but grave ones. Surely all these things, to us poor human beings, add dignity and solemnity to God's worship. Surely they remove hindrances: perhaps afford helps. Surely they come of that earnest desire to offer our Saviour of our very best; to make His house and His service all that man can make them; which dwelt in the heart of the sweet Psalmist of Israel when he said, as in the text, "I have set my affection to the house of my God."

But the movement towards greater decorum in our public worship would have been unlike all other reformations if it had not met with opposition of various kinds. The feeling which prompted some part of that opposition was a feeling worthy of all respect. There were, and there still are, many good Christian people who were impatient of any change from the

dear old ways; who had grown so warmly attached to the simple forms to which they had been accustomed from childhood, that they could not think any change from these a change for the better. All due honour to the feeling; it is a sacred one, and never to be disregarded; but yet we learn, in the process of our lives, that we shall be obliged to make up our minds to many changes which we do not like at all, if the common sense of the majority decide that they are improvements. And it is perfectly vain to think to keep the worship of our Church standing stock-still at a point to which ceaseless change has brought it. Besides this respectable sentiment, leaning against all innovation, which in other days leant against steamships and railways, against the abolition of slavery, against every political improvement that ever has been attained, various arguments of more or less force have been adduced in the same direction. It has been objected to kneeling at prayer and standing at praise, that many millions of our fellow-Christians do so: as if that were a reason why we should not. The time has been in Scotland when a determination to do just the opposite of what the vast majority of our fellow-Christians do, was a leading motive that had much to say in the settlement of forms of worship as of other ecclesiastical arrangements; but that time is happily past; and it is hard to think of anything less worthy of respect than the mere spirit of contrariety, that resolves to have something quite different from

what has been approved by most Christians at most times. Then there is what may be called the argument of the *thin end of the wedge.* The people who use this argument say that they can see no harm in organs, or in kneeling at prayer and standing at praise; but then these things, though themselves right, may perhaps lead to what is wrong. So while you fancy you are merely making your worship a little more decorous, you are in fact starting off in the direction of Popery, or perhaps of Rationalism and ultimate Infidelity. The plain answer to all this is, Whenever you are asked to make any change which is wrong, stop there. But you will never, in fact, deter any but very weak persons from doing what they think desirable and you admit to be right, by holding up the bugbear that in some way, which nobody can see, evil will come of it. I do not believe that what is, as before God, right, can ever be a step to what is wrong. And that old suggestion of the wedge has been so often proved an imposture, that with reasonable folk it has quite lost its power.

I have remarked of late that some who dislike and distrust these improvements in worship have adopted the fashion of calling such as adopt or approve them by the depreciatory name of *Ritualists.* I do not believe that any of the ministers or members of the Church who have been so described care in the least degree for the word; or mind at all what the persons

who use it think of them. But as it is conceivable that the movement may suffer in the estimation of fair and candid men through being (so to speak) ticketed with a suspected name, I should wish, in the interest of truth, to look for a little into this matter.

Now, what is Ritualism?

Ritualism, in the bad sense, cannot mean merely the maintaining and approving of certain rites, or appointed forms of worship. It is quite plain that no public worship could go on without some of these. It would never do that the congregation should assemble, and no one know what was to be done next. The very barest and simplest worship in which a congregation is to join must have its appointed forms of service for common Sundays and Communion Sundays. In short, wherever you have common or united worship, you must have a Ritual.

But Ritualism, used in a bad sense, is probably intended by the people who use the word to convey the idea of so overlaying God's worship with forms, with minute details, with ceremonial observances, that devotion exhales, and is lost in these. The idea is likewise suggested of a disposition to regard these lesser matters as of vital importance, or at least to make much of them. And Ritualism, thus understood, in its worst development comes to this: that people fancy that diligent attention to these things is the true worship of God. And no doubt it is possible for human beings, even in this age of gospel

light, to come to fancy that genuflections and prostrations, frequent repetitions of certain prescribed prayers, bodily presence in church while certain ceremonies and solemnities are being carried out, is the worship of God. To sum up: Excessive attention to the details of worship; undue elaboration of these; making too much of them; attaching too much importance to them, and resting too much in them; is Ritualism. And no one of even the most moderate acquaintance with the facts can deny that, in spite of the strong way in which Christianity sets its face against such things, what may justly be called Ritualism does exist in the Christian Church; and *that* in forms often very foolish and irritating, sometimes very delusive and mischievous.

But, in this evil sense of the word, there is in the National Church of this country no Ritualism at all. With our worship as it is, no Ritualism is possible with us. For, first, no one can say that our worship, even where most carefully studied, is overlaid with forms. Our forms are very few, and very simple. We have really as little of form as is compatible with our having any recognised order of worship at all. And next, no one among us imagines for a moment that the few little improvements aimed at,—the kneeling at prayer, standing at praise, the organ, the decorous church with its stained glass and its high-pitched gables,—can in themselves please God or profit the worshipper, apart from the true spiritual worship; that

devotion of the heart, in spirit and in truth, which our Father seeks in such as worship Him. No one fancies that if he offers prayer heartlessly, kneeling, it will do him more good than if he offers prayer heartlessly, standing. Neither does any sane person dream that if he prays to God with all his heart, the favour with which God will hear his prayer depends in the very smallest degree upon the bodily attitude in which his prayer is offered. Sitting, like King David; standing, like the poor publican; kneeling, with St Paul; or prostrate on the earth, like Elijah; it matters not a pin's weight which, so only the prayer go up through Christ, and be sincere.

It is, therefore, utterly unjust to try to excite prejudice against the improvement of our worship by raising the cry of Ritualism. The name is quite inapplicable. The use of it in this matter is simply a case of what is vulgarly termed *calling names*. It is intended to awake prejudice; or, at the best, meant to express a dislike for which there is no sound reason to be given. And it is to be remembered that the very essence of the extremest Ritualism exists in that man who makes a vital thing of the bareness and baldness of his worship; and who cleaves to that, as though there could be no hearty devotion without it. Here you have the ritualist again; probably with much sourness, narrowness, and ignorant self-sufficiency added.

I remember, and never forget, that the grand sub-

ject of every faithful minister's preaching is the blessed gospel of Christ's atoning sacrifice and the Holy Spirit's work upon the heart. I am not at all afraid that any one who hears me regularly will misjudge me as to this. But I hold it very fit that on special occasions such as the present, this question of Ritual, of so much interest to many in these days, be fairly looked at. And I take this opportunity to shortly set forth the views on it which I know to be held by many of our most diligent and enlightened clergy. Nor will it do to say the question is one of very little consequence. Everything that concerns God's worship and our duty to Him is of great consequence. All we render to Him ought to be our Best. Now, of course, our heart is our best; nothing is of any worth without that. But there are things that go with it; and signify it; and help the giving of it. And it is childish to say that because we attend to the lesser matters we must be neglecting the greater. Just the contrary is the fact. You remember wise words of our Saviour; words abundantly confirmed by experience: "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much." The minister who tries his best to have a decorous and solemn worship in his church, is just the man who will be most diligent in all his duty. The minister who is content with an ugly church and a careless service, is the man who is likely to be slovenly and careless in everything he is called to do.

You will find it readily conceded by most intelligent members of the Scotch Church, that her worship is one which, unless where performed by a minister of rare gifts both of head and heart, or where the worshippers are of far more than average spirituality and devotion of soul, is somewhat bare and unattractive. I have many opportunities of remarking how it strikes a cultivated stranger. The pre-Reformation Church in this country was so thoroughly corrupt, so bitterly bad, that our reformers thought they could not get too far away from it; and Presbytery, both in government and worship, was a vehement reaction against Popery. It may be said, without presumption, that under the circumstances then existing it was hardly possible that the Reformation should not be pushed to an extreme. That it was so, is a patent fact. Never was there worship, never government, more thoroughly different from those of the mediæval Church than we have in Scotland. And with very much that was cumbrous and bad, doubtless some things went whose absence is a loss. The magnificent cathedral of this city was one of these. Surely Romish error might have been got rid of, yet that grand church spared. The thing can be done. It was done in England; nearer home, it was done in Glasgow. Now, you and I, trained to disbelieve the infallibility of the ancient Church, are not likely to believe the infallibility of the first reformers, even in matters æsthetic. They were zealous, good, and

brave men! how brave, we can now hardly realise. We owe them an inexpressible debt of gratitude, for truth and liberty; we believe that in vital matters their doctrine was the mind of God's Spirit; but we utterly refuse to be bound by all their lesser opinions, prejudices, and crotchets, for evermore. It was a crotchet, if there ever was such a thing (and if the story be true at all), that the greatest of them expressed when he spoke of the organ in contemptuous terms that have grown proverbial; but I do not believe that the people of the many congregations among us whose worship is helped by that sacred instrument feel their enjoyment of the privilege one whit abated, merely because one great and good man had an unreasonable dislike to it. In excited times, in very special circumstances, sometimes under influences by no means healthily Scotch, our public worship was gradually formed. And it is quite certain that the best and greatest among the founders of our Church never designed the worship which was characteristic of our Church for many years. A service such as I can remember as a boy, from which the reading of God's Word was excluded from year's end to year's end; in which the singing of God's praise was reduced to the least thing possible; in which that prayer was never heard which Christ taught and commanded; in which the sermon was the outstanding and important thing, and in which the prayers were often merely sermons in disguise: was far, far

away from the brave and honest heart of Knox. But if it were otherwise, I should not care. No laws, or arrangements, can bind posterity. Posterity will think for itself. And this present generation, in the exercise of its undoubted right, is deciding in favour of churches liker the house of God than we have been used to, and of a service more worthy. We do not propose to degrade the sermon from its due place, but to lift up to their due eminence the places of prayer and praise. We will never forget that the only acceptable worship is that which is offered in spirit and in truth; but we remember, too, that outward circumstances will always act powerfully on the worshipper's mind, either as helps or as hindrances.

It is in itself a fit thing that God's worship should be surrounded by such external circumstances of dignity and solemnity as those to which I have several times referred. There is an essential propriety in the case. While human nature remains such as it is, accessories will be important, and will be felt as such. There are exceptional persons who have no feeling at all as to forms in the service of God; not at all of necessity through superior spirituality, but simply because through their make and nature they do not care for these things. Then, on the other hand, there are those who are peculiarly interested and impressed by outward proprieties and solemnities; not by any means through lack of spirituality, still less through lack of devotion, but just because such are their

nature and training. And nature has more to do with the matter than training. I have never known a deeper longing after such stately and ornate worship as the choral service of the Anglican Church, than among those reared and educated under the straitest severities of Presbytery. But, setting apart exceptional persons, the average Christian feels the fitness of which I speak. When the Parliament of the nation is opened and closed, it is with all due ceremony. The proceedings of our higher courts of justice are conducted with all decorous state: and every one knows that where this has been neglected, a grievous loss is soon felt. So should it be with what is, in itself, the most solemn of all occupations, the public worship of Almighty God. Worship through the great Mediator: worship by the blessed Spirit: and the solemnity of soul and mind will inevitably manifest itself in a corresponding solemnity of outward demeanour. On that memorable day which gave the human race its right Universal Prayer, the external deportment of the poor publican,—the downcast eyes, the smiting on the breast, the modest position "afar off,"—surely all these things harmonised with that frame of spirit which breathes yet through the "God be merciful to me a sinner!" But, indeed, I would not argue with any one who denied that outward seemliness is fitting in the public worship of the Church. The thing is too plain. And it is curious to remark how even those who strip their worship barest of all

ritual, have yet some little thing they stop at and stand up for. That petty sectarian flock which, without at all deserving it, was ministered to by John Foster, though bitterly opposed to all decent wearing of robes by officiating ministers, was yet infinitely scandalised when the preacher faithfully carried out their principle by appearing in his pulpit in a blue coat and a red waistcoat. A gown or a surplice they could not bear; but still they insisted that their minister must be dressed in black. It was nature asserting herself even where stupid bigotry had done its utmost to expel her.

I go on to say, that surely it is right to do all we can, within legitimate limits, to make God's house and worship attractive. No doubt, if all professing Christians were all they ought to be, the bare fact of spiritual communion with God through Christ, in that united prayer which is promised a special answer, would be enough; nothing more would be needed to draw us, with cords of love, to the house of prayer. My friends, it is lamentably true that *that* is not enough. Further attraction is needful, appealing to lower elements in our nature. A popular preacher; grand music; a magnificent church; do, as a matter of fact, bring out very many who would not be drawn by the mere spiritual worship of God. Would God it were otherwise! But fact is fact; and you may be thankful if you can lead human beings to do what in itself is right, by the use of even somewhat inferior

means. Then we must all confess, not without a certain humiliation, that our spiritual moods are sadly affected by little outward circumstances. A very rainy Communion Sunday, when communicants arrive at church in a condition of great physical discomfort; how such a day will affect the pleasure and profit of Communion! A little bodily pain while in church at an ordinary service; an unhealthily heated atmosphere in the church; how these things distract attention and abate enjoyment! All that is humbling; but it is true. And to very many worshippers there is no bodily pain, no physical discomfort, which so painfully jars on devout feeling and distracts solemn thought, as such graceless irreverence as I have often seen in country churches; the barn-like building, the horrible singing, the general rudeness and squalor that characterise the entire service. You may be angry with yourself that you are so hindered and clogged by these miserable externalities: you may confess it in your evening prayer as a sin, and painfully feel as though it were mainly your own fault: but unless you could get another nervous system you never will wholly rise above these influences while your soul dwells in the flesh. The most devout, if they have a sensitive organisation, will feel these things; far more the average worshipper. Now, brethren, I say it is a bounden duty to make God's worship such, that there shall be nothing about it to jar on the right mood of mind and heart with which

we should pray to wait upon it. I would not have it in the power of even the most regardless to plead as an excuse for absence from church, that really the whole service when he last was there was so rude, so uninteresting, that there was no inducement to go back again. And utterly disbelieving (as I utterly disbelieve) the power of scolding to dragoon people to God's house; firmly believing that people must be drawn to God's house and not driven; I strongly hold that it is right, that it is a Christian duty, to make the church, and everything about it, such, that all kinds of people may be attracted to it with somewhat of the Psalmist's feeling in their heart—"How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!" And if they come, drawn by mixed motives somewhat short of the highest and best of all, still they may be lifted up by praise; and led into hearty joining in prayer that interprets their deepest wants and wishes, and expresses them: and the preacher has them within hearing of his voice; it will be his own fault if he do not constrain them to attend to it; and he may hope, by God's grace, to impress and profit, to startle and convert, to edify and comfort. Wherefore we say, by all fair means attract human beings to God's house, and interest them while there. We repudiate, indeed, with the keenest of repudiation, the vulgar arts of the pulpit quack, the most hateful of all quackery. But we say, let the church be the most beautiful place the poor man ever sees. Let it abide in his remembrance

through the week, the house like which there is none other; with its solemn light, its saintly majesty, its holy calm. Let the praises be the best and sweetest, the result of pious skill and reverent care. Let the prayers be diligently gathered from the Universal Church's rich stores of devout thought and expression, coming of abundant study, and themselves the outcome of many earnest prayers. And let the outward reverence of all the worshippers testify to the profound inward sense in Whose house they are met, and in Whose presence: that all things may speak of "worshipping the Lord in the beauty of holiness," "worshipping in spirit and in truth."

Dear friends, if all *that* be as yet, in many places, no better than a pleasant vision, it is surely one worth pains, and prayer, and patient endurance, to bring forth to a glorious reality. There are prejudices to be overcome; many difficulties in the way. But we must work, and wait. And if the work be God's work, God will bring it in His good time!

IV.

REST.

"This is not your rest."—MICAH ii. 10.

WE are going on, my friends: years are passing away. There are anniversaries in our lives: occasions, like the fall of the leaf, like the returning communion season with its crowd of warm and solemn remembrances; that bring this home to us. And as the years pass on, we lose in some ways. But there is one great gain that comes to us, if we take it rightly: we know what to expect of this life. We know the best we shall get. There may be things coming to us, beyond our experience hitherto: awful bodily pain, sudden bereavement, long and wearing anxiety. These things have come to others; they may be coming to us. But if we do not know the worst of this life, we know the best of it. There is no need to unduly cry it down: it is not the best of men who have spoken the worst of this world. Yet, without *that*, we may say that a life, whose whole interest is on this side of time, comes to be a weary round, and unsatisfying. You cannot expect the

elate step, nor the very light heart, commonly. You can get on; and be thankful; and wish all others were as well as yourselves. But, as time advances, this life tends, with most, to be made up of hard and constant work; of anxiety, as to your means, as to your children; of little vexations and cross-incidents arising from unexpected quarters; of troubles that come of not being on your guard, not being suspicious enough, being too outspoken, and the like. Life is a disappointment, even to the most successful; in the sense that it does not come up to early youthful hopes. It would not do that all this should go on for ever. Now, we want what will.

It is in this experience that we get good, as we go on through successive years: that is, if we take the discipline as we ought. "This is not our rest:" and in all these ways God is telling us so. And being so assured, more and more, the more we ought to feel that we must try in another direction. It is right, most right, that we should all wish to be happy: now, this world will not do. The pleasures and profits of this world, God has said determinately, will not do. They cannot content these souls that are within us: only Christ can do *that!* There are two things certain about our being here, so long as we try to find our soul's portion in the things of sense and time. One is, that if you desire a thing very much, and think how greatly you would enjoy it, and toil ever so hard for it, yet it may please God to say,

No, not that: you shall not have that: you must resign your mind to do without it. The other is, that if you get the thing, all you had wished, it will not be what you had thought. The charm will be gone from it. That is the fashion and way of this world. This life, and all the interests of this life, are marked with *unsatisfactoriness*. It is the glory of our immortal nature that nothing can perfectly or long satisfy it except God himself. The poor inferior animals, our humble fellow-creatures, are content when they have what this life can yield them: they have no further-reaching want than the supply of bodily comfort. But nothing whatsoever, that begins and ends on this present state of being, can quench the soul's thirst. We want something else; something more. You may not know it; you may never have thought of it: but your "souls thirst for God, for the living God!" You may fancy that this or that worldly blessing would set you right: it would not! And besides, think of the awful uncertainty of all we care for here. It is a question of Time with all. A few days may, a few years must, part us. The pleasant home; books; friends; children: how slight our hold on them; how easily and swiftly broken! And more: all these things are changing; are leaving us; are losing (some of them) their interest and savour; as we feel a lessening relish for all in this life. What can we do, in the thought of all this, and of innumerable vivid glimpses we have each had into the unsatis-

factoriness and uncertainty of all things here; but look up to our merciful Saviour, and say well-remembered words said a hundred times before, but whose meaning we can understand now infinitely better than when we said them or saw them first: "Thou hast made us for Thyself; and our heart is restless till it resteth in Thee!"

My friends, it is a wonderful thing, an inexpressibly precious thing, for creatures like us, to find out something which will not lose its interest as we grow old: which we shall always like better, and find a greater charm in: which we are perfectly sure to get, if we honestly try; and which we can keep always. Now there is such a thing; and only one such. It was no wonder that our Blessed Redeemer Himself called it the One Thing Needful: and it is, shortly, to find, and know, and believe in Him. To take the great step, of casting off from ourselves the care of ourselves; rolling all upon Him; looking to Him, alone, altogether, for pardon, peace, holiness, comfort, guidance,—in brief, for everything we need, or ever can need, here, or wherever we can ever go. Now, this is the only thing that can satisfy: satisfy in so far here, because here the imperfection of grace in us, the presence of sin in us, and never-ceasing troubles around us, must always hinder our being here all we would be: but satisfy fully hereafter, where all that can defile, mislead, or vex, shall be excluded finally. Now, it is a discouraging thing to an earnest,

honest spirit, when great religious lessons and truths are set out in a vague, misty way: oh give us truth and reality when it comes to the question of the only thing that can hold us up in the awful hour we die: and I desire, by God's grace, at this time, that we all may be helped very clearly and plainly to recall, and understand, what it exactly is to go to Christ; and how exactly it is that it comes of *that* to have an unfailing spring of satisfaction, and peace, and rest, and consolation. Now may God's Holy Spirit be very specially present with each of us, speaking and hearing of these serious things.

Well, when we speak of turning from the unsatisfying things of time and sense to the enduring realities of eternity, what is the precise thing that is meant? Plainly, it is the same thing which is sometimes spoken of as "looking not to the things which are seen but to those which are unseen,"—or as "setting the affection on things above, not on things on the earth,"—or as "seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." But we must have a real explanation of all this. These have grown very much to be conventional phrases, failing to convey any distinct sense to many people.

But they mean, that we think to ourselves, Here we are, tied to a never-ending life: bound to go on in conscious existence for ever and ever. Then we know, that, passing into the world which is beyond the grave, there are just two states; holiness and

happiness, sin and loss and woe. And, God be thanked, He has, in the mission and death of His Son our Saviour, provided for our being eternally holy and happy. Thinking of these things; praying to understand and feel them; the Holy Spirit comes; works on our souls when we fancy we are judging and resolving for ourselves; inclines us, constrains us, to make choice of Christ and believe on Him. This He does in various ways, in the case of different people. Sometimes the soul is overwhelmed by an awful sense of guilt and danger: and we run to Christ in utter fear. Sometimes there is nothing more urgent than a deep sense that all else is passing, hollow, unsatisfying: and we go to Christ in Whom all fulness dwells, that the hungry and thirsty soul may be content. Sometimes there is an inexpressible weariness: we have tried everywhere for truth, for good, and have only grown wearier: and then a kind Voice suits itself to the exigency, and says "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Various are the experiences that lead poor creatures like us to the Blessed Redeemer: but we may generalise so far as to say that in every case we feel our need of Him, and go to Him, and believe on Him.

Feeling our need of Him is simply said: it means that we know something is wrong about us, all wrong: we are so miserable, so sinful, so unable to make ourselves any wiser or better, so foolish and evil and unhappy in our heart,—that we are sure a kind God

never meant us to be this way: and something has said to us, some voice within or without, that Jesus Christ the Saviour can mend all that, and set that right which is wrong. And as for going to Him, finding Him, believing on Him, would that this could be made as plain to all! Well, for one thing, it is the taking of a decisive step. I venture not to say, but that sometimes it may not be so. Doubtless there are those in Heaven, and those in the Church on earth, who never were converted: who needed no conversion: who were regenerated in baptism, as we pray all Christian children may be; or with whom the better birth and the earthly were as one: whose faith in Christ grew with the development of their natural faculties, and had as little of conscious beginning as these: and with such happy ones, blest above the race, there was no such time of decision, no such decided step, as we thought of. But, with ordinary believing people, there was a time, there were many times, when, deeply convinced that nothing else would avail, that there was salvation in no other, they went with all their souls' sins and wants, and cast themselves at the feet of the great Redeemer. Dear friends, ask the Holy Spirit to explain that, and make you do it: and then you will know what it means. We can set it out in words to a certain degree: saying that in believing on Christ we trust our souls to Him to purify and save: we renounce all self-dependence, give up every earthly stay, and fly to Him as our only

hope: placing our entire reliance on His atoning blood and His spotless righteousness: looking to Him alone for help and patience here, for rest and joy above. Now, with most, there are times of decision, when all that is done: done more or less heartily, more or less joyfully, with more or less sense that it is done effectually. But it is not done just for once. We must do it anew every day. Every day anew, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling." In every prayer, we do that anew. Whenever we are in doubt whether we have done it really, let us go and do it again: let us turn to Him anew. A moment of time is enough: a silent lifting up of the heart to the Saviour, always ready to welcome: *that* is believing on Christ and being saved. At this moment, if any professing Christian here present be in doubt whether up to this time he have really and fully believed, look up to Christ, He is within hearing, and say "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." All this is a thing to be spiritually discerned: but it is not unintelligible, not even mystical. The case is this: Do you feel you cannot save yourself? Are you content that Christ should save you? Do you consent to this?

And there need be no excitement about this: there is nothing feverish in an act of faith. Do not fancy that it is not rightly done, unless you can force yourself up to strong emotion. A thing may be very deep, though it be quiet. Here is a calm choice, to be

calmly made: a calm deed, to be calmly done. And when you have believed on Christ, you have done a thing which may be put, and stated, in various ways. But one thing, assuredly, you have done, when you have believed on Christ: You have turned, for your soul's true lot and portion, from the seen to the unseen.

And now there is more, far more, to be done, which amounts to that too. When you have believed on Christ, you cannot just turn back to worldly things and interests, and go on with them just as before. You will find, you ought to find, that a change has passed upon them all. Everybody has found this out, who has gone through this decisive time. One who went through it, long ago, has described it better than any one else ever did. He has described it in words you have heard before. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." And the main cause of this great change is this: That whereas naturally we think that the things of this world would satisfy us and make us happy if we could only get all we want, now we see that it is not so: and though living still among things seen and temporal, and sometimes forced to be careful and troubled about these, yet we cleave to that which is unseen and spiritual and eternal, and work mainly for ends not discernible by sense. Now, what is meant when we

speak of working towards unseen ends? What exactly have we got to do every day, when once we have set ourselves to working in that way? Well, it means this: that now the thing we most wish and work for, has ceased to be outside success and progress, getting little distinctions and honours, getting on a little, growing better off. That is all well enough, but it is not the first thing: we know of something better: something which will make us happier than that; and which will bring us the cheering sense of God's approval in doing it, as other things never can. And this is, that we try to grow holier and better: That we cultivate our heart, and keep it: That we set ourselves to put down bad tendencies within us, and perverse affections. There comes, under some juncture of outward circumstances, an impulse to feel unkindly, enviously, discontentedly: and then to act accordingly. Now, here is something to do. You know in yourself that this impulse, however natural it be, however urgent that you yield to it, is wrong: Christ could never approve your speaking or acting as it would make you speak or act: Well, set yourself to put that down! You have received great provocation: you have great reason to be angry: By God's grace you will not: Up, and fight against the temptation. It will cost you time: it will cost you trouble: you will not do it by one single effort or prayer: it will take many prayers and efforts, often coming from a sore and sorrowful heart;

but you are perfectly sure, if you really mean it, to succeed in the end. And when you have succeeded, you will feel very happy: very thankful: humbled indeed, and well assured that you never did that or any good thing in any strength of your own; but more substantially happy at heart than if you had hit an enemy ever so hard, or ever so cleverly tripped up a rival;—aye, or ever so honestly and fairly won some worldly gain or honour. And you will never get tired of this; never while you live. Fighting with temptation; with evil in yourself; you will find in this a never-failing interest, and one of the most varied kind. While worldly aims and ends lose their interest as years pass on, this never will. Though reverses and failures come in your outward lot, here there may be unbroken success, growth, and prosperity: You will always, to the end, be growing a richer and happier man;—gaining possessions which cannot be seen indeed, but which are the most substantial of all. Yes, you have learned now to look, not to the things which are seen but to the things which are not seen: and then "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." A holy heart, resigned to God's will, renewed and sanctified, delivered from the dominion of evil, reaching always after more grace, is one of the things which are eternal. And being so, it is a thing you can never get tired of. It is not a thing that comes to its bloom and perfection, and then fades and goes. It is a

visitor from that enduring world which is our rest. It is Christ in you, divine and immortal!

Here, then, is some portion, some anticipation, of the true satisfying rest of a better world. It is holiness of heart, it is likeness to Christ, it is a sanctifying soul. Here is a possession which you are sure to get if you honestly strive and earnestly pray for it: Here is a possession whose charm will not vanish when it is won: Here is a possession which will satisfy; and whose interest will always be fresh when other interests fade with your fading self. And there is no mystery as to the way in which every humble human being is to set about the gaining of it. Look into your heart: you will easily see something amiss: Set yourself, praying for God's help, to mend it. This is your work: and, strange to say, herein is your rest: Thus doing, you are seeking and finding the "continuing city." It will draw you very near your Saviour, if every day, every morning, you think, Now, here is something to set right by the help of the Holy Spirit: I am turning cold-hearted and indevout; I am growing worldly again, and self-seeking: I am growing envious, suspicious, harsh of temper, hasty of speech: I am growing care-worn, depressed, unthankful: All that must be changed: O Blessed Saviour, give Thy Spirit to change it! And then the solid comfort of feeling, if we could but really feel, that all the worries, all the petty sordid vexations which come of dealings with impracticable,

wrong-headed, stupid, dishonest people, all the growing weariness, and the blank dissatisfaction, and the gleam gone from this world, are God's discipline to work the higher inner health and life and prosperity. Even in seasons of despondency, deep almost as Elijah's, what a true help, just to cling to this one thing, and hold it tight in the darkness, that God has sent this: This is what I need: Let His Blessed Spirit make it do what He intended. Dear friends, if in any good measure we succeed in attaining this, then, in so doing, we have transferred our true interest and our soul's portion from this outer worldly scene, with its innumerable accidents and mischances, never to be quite guarded against, and from whose reach not even God's own people (though loved of Him) are free; to that serener inner region where there are no mischances; where it may be all prosperity, all growth, all increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end. We have got away from the strifes and storms of time, into the calm of eternity: we have turned from the seen to the unseen: we have set our true life where it is no longer at the mercy of a thousand outward contingencies, but where it is "hid with Christ in God."

And all this is done, in sober truth, when we turn our main thought from the outward cares and incidents of our life, to the character which is growing up in us under these. It is not the scaffolding any more that we chiefly mind, but the building which is

gradually rising up within it. It does not matter so much now, whether in this world we are to get all we used to wish, in the respect of worldly wealth and standing and success: if only, by God's kind grace, all things are made to work together to make us holier, kinder, more humble, more patient, more sympathetic, more like what Christ was. It does not matter so much now, whether our children and all we care for are to reach the worldly place which we may yet confess we should desire for them,—making far better of this life than we have ever done,—if God would but fill their hearts with His Holy Spirit, and make them so take all that comes to them, as that all may go to make them more like Christ. For then it will indeed be well with us; well with our children; well with all: well here, well hereafter. The thing is sure: nothing can be more sure. We can go no farther in the explanation of it, than to say that God has so made us, that if we try faithfully to live a life in Christ, to battle with evil in our hearts, to seek after holiness, we shall feel in ourselves a solid peace and content and happiness in no other way to be found in this world; which is in truth an anticipation and foretaste of heaven. This is to lay hold on eternal life: This is to drink some share at least of that living water, of which whoso drinks need thirst no more. This is what is meant when we speak of our souls, made for God, and restless (hopelessly restless) elsewhere, resting in Him! Oh may that

peace of God, which passeth all understanding, fill our hearts and minds!

You see, then, you who are often weary, often disappointed, never fully satisfied, where to go for rest, for prosperity, for content full and large. No doubt, the imperfection and sinfulness of our nature will make all these things imperfect in this life. But this is the way to go. This way lies that Rest, which this world is not for us, and can never be. In Christ is rest: let us go to Him anew to-day. You have been stirred up, only by way of remembrance, to go to Him; and reminded what afterwards it becomes us to do. By God's grace we shall do it all: by God's grace. And never was there a time in this world's history, in which poor weary creatures needed all this more. Old beliefs are assailed: old likings are held cheap: old and dear prepossessions and (if you will) prejudices are rudely swept away. It cannot be other than a troubled world to thinking people now. Not any more in our time can there be, in religion, in state or in church, the even quietness for which many would be thankful. And there are other changes too. The seasons, indeed, come and go as heretofore: the leaves grow green and grow yellow: the days lengthen and draw in as they used: but this world is not the same. The Communion season comes round as of old; and there is the same Saviour to remember; but we know in ourselves that there is a great change. And, doubtless, we shall change still

more. The dearest things to each of us are going away from being what they used to be. Your children will not always be the merry little children: nor can you have them all under your roof as it once was. More and more, trouble hems us in: and we need a portion and a stay elsewhere. Blessed be God's Name, we know Where. This is not our rest: but our rest is not only beyond the grave. It is here: here in Christ; if we will go to Him truly, and seek His Spirit constantly, and live by never-ceasing prayer. Then we, and all we love, shall be lifted up into a calm region, above all worldly disquiet; above the reach of it. Safe in Christ's hand: sure of Christ's love: it is not "Thy will be done, not mine:" it is something higher and better. It is "Thy will be done; for, in all things, Thy will is mine too!"

V.

THE VOLUNTEER ARMY.*

"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."—ISAIAH ii. 4.

YOU have wished, Volunteers, complying with a right and decorous custom, to assemble yourselves, as a body, together in the house of God, here to join in common worship. You have concluded, led to that conclusion by your sound heads and kind hearts, that in the present circumstances of this city, bereaved of him who worthily filled the place of its municipal Head, it was no time this for even the most innocent gaiety. But you have concluded, too, that there are no circumstances, how sorrowful soever, in which it is not fit that we should join together in praying for God's blessing upon our Country: upon her defenders by land and sea: upon all her people, small and great: upon our own souls, and daily life: upon all we care for. And this, among other things, we desire at this time heartily to do. No doubt, through all the wor-

* Preached to a Volunteer Corps, of which the author is chaplain.

ship of this day, there has been the sense of something lost: our thoughts have sometimes been of the brave old soldier, the gallant gentleman, the downright out-spoken honest man, with the warm heart and the open hand, who last Sunday was yet the living Chief Magistrate of this place; and who to-day is gone. And it may be permitted one to whom it fell in various ways to see much of him, to bear one testimony among many to the conscientious pains with which he gave himself to his public duty: to the chivalrous spirit which gave a tone to all he said and did: to his unostentatious but always-ready charity: to his willingness to listen to reason: and perhaps, too, a word may be said, without presuming too far upon the innermost sanctities of life, of that simple resignation to God's will which made him, though taken away from a happy family-circle, and from much that was very dear and hopeful, yet pass from this world without a regret, save for the beloved ones left behind him.

Passing from a matter of which it was impossible for me not to say as much, it now falls to me to address to you some words which may seem suitable to this occasion. My text appears to suggest fitting reflections. Though the present service, Volunteers, be specially your own, you are aware that you are surrounded by many of your fellow-Christians; interested in all that interests you. And my desire is, my friends, that by God's kind grace, that which is now to be

said, may have its little portion of not unprofitable thought for all of us.

Now this text, as you know, is an inspired prophecy; and therefore sure to be accomplished at some time. There will be a day, there can be no doubt of it, when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." But, in our less hopeful moods, we may all have thought to ourselves, that it is foretold these peaceful times shall come, just as it is foretold that all evil, physical and moral, shall one day cease. It may be a long, long time till then: Human sin and sorrow may yet have a weary time to last. We hardly think, sometimes, that the prophecy in the text will be fulfilled, till very near that other time predicted, when "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." Our sinful and contentious race must be greatly changed, changed for the better, before the curse of war shall be finally swept away. For war just means that people who hate each other, or fancy they hate each other, or are set on by artful men to behave as if they hated each other; shall diligently set themselves to do each other all the harm they can. And I suppose that to do another all the harm you can, is the full-blown consequence of your hating him. And I suppose that to the unsanctified human heart, it is natural to hate another when his interests clash with yours,—that is, when he gains by your losing: likewise to

hate another when he thinks differently from you on some question on which you feel keenly; likewise to hate another when he is more successful in any way than you,—which indeed is to some the most insufferable of all provocation. Of course, in war, the disposition to do harm to those regarded as enemies is allowed to run to a length elsewhere quite unknown: but even in the trimness and restraint of ordinary social life in a civilised country, you may see abundant proof how natural war is to fallen man. Doubtless we ought in honour to prefer one another. No one should go beyond a neighbour in any matter. We should love our neighbour as ourself and seek his good as our own. We ought, in short, all to be filled with the spirit of Christ, and to love as brethren and live in peace. But you know there is nearly as little of that in civilised lands and among professed Christian people as elsewhere. Men are ready to stand up keenly for their own advantage; and keenly to resist and bitterly to resent aggression: and there you have the very root of war. War is nothing other than the fully developed flower of private anger. And nations are swayed by the same passions as individuals. You know too, how sometimes, destructive wars have been stirred up by wicked and unscrupulous men between nations that had really no anger at one another; no anger to begin with: but it suited the plans of wicked ministers of state, and it gratified the ambition of the puppet monarchs they governed,

to spread the awful miseries of warfare over great tracts of this world: and they did so with as little regard to the sentient and immortal beings they dealt with, as if these sentient beings were the unconscious pieces on a chess-board. Now, the only complete assurance that war shall cease, must be in the Christianising and sanctifying of all human beings. Make it perfectly sure that every man everywhere shall at every time act on the principles of the New Testament: and there will be an end of war. But the existence of even a small percentage of humanity that will not always act on the principles of the New Testament, would make sure of the continuance of war. For *there* would be the element of attack: and unless where peace principles are fairly run mad, the possibility of attack by the bad and reckless, will make sure that the means of defence shall be provided by the good and careful. If there be wild beasts abroad, the prudent man will look to his locks and bars: yes, and will see, besides, to the weapon which may save longer anxiety about the wild beast, by destroying it as soon as may be. And while there remain in the number of mankind, very many of those more cruel, artful, and selfish, than any wild beast, it will be the sacred duty of every Christian nation and Christian man to be prepared to defend life, and home, and children, and property, against such. And if these can be defended only by the destruction of the wolves and tigers of the race, then, with

regret indeed, but without a vestige of doubt that they are doing right, Christian nations and Christian men must destroy them.

But though war, in a world still lying in wickedness, will not cease as yet, as it ought to cease, through the universal diffusion of Christian principle and feeling, yet inferior motives may be suggested meanwhile, which may weigh with those who would not care for higher. This is a rich country: it is at least a country which has in it much wealth along with dismal masses of hopeless poverty: and so this country has in it much to invite the cupidity and the violence of the lawless and reckless, both among nationalities and individual men. It would be utterly vain, it would be utterly ridiculous, to suggest to such, as a reason for letting us alone, that it would be sinful, and opposed to God's will, to attack an unoffending people. *That* consideration would have no effect at all. But it would have effect, and most weighty effect, to convince such that there is no use in attacking us: that it is quite vain to attack us: because we are so well prepared against attack that any attack would be fruitless. In the present state of the world, in the present state of Europe, I have great faith in such a consideration as this. No one who watches the politics of nations, will believe that these always go on high and pure principles of Christianity and right. It is unhappily true, that in present circumstances, when a private individual declares

that he is actuated by high and pure motives, not many people believe him: but when he frankly says he is just looking out for his own interests, everybody believes him at once. So, meanwhile, is it with nations: even with nations calling themselves Christian. In the case of any civilised nation except Britain and the United States of America, the only assurance you can have that it will not meddle with a neighbour, will be, that that neighbour is so able to defend himself, that it would not suit to meddle with him. Though it may seem paradoxical, it is certain, that in this age, as in other ages, the very best means of securing peace for a nation, is, that the nation should have a good deal of warlike spirit. You do not run your head against a stone wall: you know it would be your head that would suffer. You do not grasp a thistle: your fingers would smart, not the thistle. It is quite so with a nation. If it can resist aggression, it is left in peace. If it is the aggressor that is sure to suffer, it is left in peace. You know it does not do in private life to be too amiable. People will come to presume on you: to take advantage of you. A certain potentiality of even what may be called ill temper, on due occasion, has its uses. I beg that no one will misunderstand me: I speak as to wise men, and Christian men. You remember the well-known motto of our country: No one shall molest me with impunity. That being understood, no one will molest at all. I counsel nothing revenge-

ful: nothing spiteful. I am thinking of the retribution which, by the nature of things, must follow an unjust attack on one strong enough to resist it. I am thinking of nothing further than the damage which the maker of the unjust attack will needs bring upon himself.

Let me now go on to say, that the great test of the efficiency of some machinery, is, that it should seldom or never need to be used. People know so well it is there, and know so well it is ready for work, that they do not provoke it. And *that* is the proof that it is doing what it was meant to do. There are in this world what may be called Deterrent Agencies: engines made, and most carefully made, not (if possible) to be used. The more common type of engine, is that which is made for use. There is such a thing as the machine you make; and as you make it, you hope it will be often used. Such a thing is a locomotive steam-engine. It would be a miserable disappointment to the ingenious men who planned it out, and made it, till it stood complete, a miracle of strength and speed; if, after it was brought to perfection, you locked it up in the railway shed, to stand idle there. But there is another type of engine, of instrument, upon which abundance of ingenuity, of strength, of expense, is lavished: to a very different purpose. There is such a thing as the instrument you make; and polish and prepare to the very best of your power: hoping earnestly (if you be a right-

hearted person) that it may never be used. For what is the sword-blade so carefully tempered, and fashioned with a woful calculation? Why, that it may kill! That it may be able to make some poor wife a broken-hearted widow; some poor little child fatherless! But the brave soldier, as he buckles on his sword, though knowing what he may need to do with it, hopes he may never need! The rifled cannon is carefully designed (possibly by a good kind man that would not kill a fly) to deal death upon his fellow-creatures, miles off: the explosive shell skilfully calculated to cast around those death-bearing fragments which have dealt wounds so ghastly and horrible upon poor human flesh and bone: the iron beak of the war-ship, hidden under the water, is designed by all the science of the nineteenth Christian century to go crashing through the side of a hostile vessel, and send the hundreds, pent under its decks, down to swift and awful destruction: but who does not understand that it is the most earnest wish of all concerned in the devising and making of such destructive agencies; that it is the most earnest wish of the Christian nations that number such agencies among the equipments of their country; that these agencies may never need to be used? And the better able they are to do their work: the more terrible and sure the devastation they are capable of dealing: the less likely they are to be needed. They will serve the country's purpose by exercising a moral

force: They will so act upon men's minds, as to save the awful necessity of being actually used against limb and life. We have been told, lately, by an experienced soldier, that the force of even a charge with fixed bayonets is almost always a moral force: that it seldom happens that hostile weapons are actually crossed, or that hostile masses of soldiery come into actual physical collision. For when the weaker number sees it is overmatched and overweighted, it will not abide the actual brunt. The weaker number saves the necessity of the actual use of the deadly weapon, by yielding.

Now, it is so too with moral machinery. When Authority is known to be undoubted and strong, no one tries to resist it. So it never needs to be exerted. But if Authority be somewhat weakly; not quite well grounded, not forcible in its executive: then people set themselves up against it: and it must take severe measures, even cruel ones, to keep itself in existence at all.

Again, the Law denounces punishment against a certain offence. Well, what is the proof that the Law is doing its work effectually? Why, surely, that punishment should never need to be inflicted. The Law is not shown to be effectual when a great many are suffering the punishment it denounces. It is shown to be effectual when it inspires a wholesome fear of the punishment it denounces: when those who might be disposed to offend are so thoroughly assured of the

certainty and severity of the punishment the Law will inflict upon every offender; that no one is actually under punishment at all.

My friends of the Volunteer Army, surely the bearing of all that has been said is plain, upon your position, and your efficiency. This magnificent Army of free citizens, enrolling and disciplining themselves for the country's defence;—this grand Volunteer Army, of which it is your pride to form part;—is as truly an agency of Peace as is any missionary or religious society: yea, as truly an agency of Peace as is the Church of Christ Herself. It appeals to men from another side indeed than that from which Christianity appeals to them: and it suggests for men's consideration a different set of motives, and (we may frankly confess) a very inferior set of motives: but it points to the same end, Peace. This Volunteer movement, this unmistakable indication of the existence in Britain of a certain measure of warlike spirit, and of a resolute purpose to provide at all sacrifices for our country's efficient defence; I say inculcates Peace on all who may become aware of its existence (and civilisation does not number many who are unaware of its existence), in as true a sense as our holy religion herself does. It comes with infinitely lower motives than the faith of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace: it appeals to an infinitely lower portion of man's nature: but with this wicked world as it is,

lower motives are to multitudes the most substantial by far; and those must be appealed to through their lower nature in whom there is little trace of anything higher or nobler to appeal to. Such an agency as our Volunteer army, with its arms of precision, its thousands of skilled marksmen, its hearts fired with the thought that should they fight, it will be for children and home and all they care for in this world,—it does not say to surrounding nations, Live in peace towards us, for it is God's will: but it says, Live in peace: you had better! You had better for your own sakes. You will not make anything by trying the other thing with us. Yes, Volunteers: *that* is the meaning of your army's existence. You do not put it in words. There is not the least need that you should. It is perfectly understood without *that:* aye, understood by all Europe!

And the more effective you are: the less suspicion there is of anything like a mere playing at soldiers: the more grave and earnest the spirit in which you set yourselves to the mastering of that military education which may fit you for meeting an awful possibility: the more manifest your fitness for the stern work which may lie before every Scotchman and Englishman who can carry a rifle; the less likely will you be to be called to actual warfare. You form part of a grand machinery which every patriot would wish to see brought to the very perfection of efficiency, in the hope that that very perfection of efficiency may

make sure that it shall never be used. What your country asks of you meanwhile; what she hopes she may always ask of you: is rather your moral force, than the actual physical weight of bayonets and rifle balls. But your moral weight, in the eyes of many a possible enemy that is watching you narrowly, comes directly of the skill with which, on due occasion, you could handle the bayonet and use the rifle and the cannon. Not the patriotic fire, which it would be an insult to suppose wanting in one of you: not the courage and endurance never lacking in the Scot, whether Saxon or Celt: not these alone will suffice, for these might leave the bravest little more than a mob before the onset of veteran soldiers; but the actual skill and discipline which come only through long and diligent education, some of it through wearisome details;—the earnest training of months and years;—this is what will make you a defensive force with which no enemy will care to meddle: this is what will make you like the impregnable fastness which has so easy a time, because no hostile force will venture that attack which would only be to rush upon its own ruin. It is a patriotic, intelligent, vast, thoroughly-disciplined army and navy, loyally used for defence alone, that will make life in Britain secure and quiet, like life in unattacked Gibraltar or harmless Ehrenbreitstein! I said that no patriot would wish to see our Volunteers used in the rough work of actual war. Not that you would not do it well; we

all know you would: But you are too valuable,—you cost too much,—we prize you too much,—to play with such stakes unless in the country's very last extremity: *You* are not made to be the counters with which despotism plays its selfish, desperate game! I know you in your homes; and by what you are there I know how you would be missed: God forbid the dread necessity! But fit yourselves for the Volunteer's possible work: make yourselves masters of it: make yourselves the mighty engine which no one tries to resist; and thus which abides so quiet. All we want is to be let alone: No man dreams that we desire to molest any human being. The end of your organisation is not defiance but defence!

So it is, Volunteers and friends, in the present state of this sinful world, our Country, armed to the teeth, with her claws strong and sharp, able to defend herself and desiring to attack no one, is a missionary of peace. And you, men of peace, dwelling in civil vocations, by diligently mastering the art of warfare, are hastening the time,—yea, assuring us some foretaste of it,—when "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more!"

My message to-night, my friends, has indeed been very different from that which I am accustomed to deliver from this pulpit. I should not feel happy, I say frankly, if I often preached a sermon setting out

so much of worldly political philosophy, within these walls where my great privilege is to speak always of pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace: of the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ our Blessed Redeemer. But we are met in exceptional circumstances: and I have sought to set forth certain truths suited to the exceptional relation in which the preacher and those who are specially the hearers stand to-night to one another. Those to whom I am wont to preach, know far too well what are the doctrines I preach, to suffer me to have the least uneasy feeling lest my views be misunderstood, unless I took pains to give you to-night a sketch of all Christian truth: as good men used to do forty years ago, whatever the text they preached from. Yet let me, as I conclude, remind you that without God's blessing, all human defences of city or country are vain: and exhort you, here as elsewhere, to add earnest prayer for God's blessing to your best work and most diligent watchfulness. Let me remind you, too, that only he will be a good soldier in the cause of his Queen and Country, who is the faithful soldier and servant of the Captain of our Salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. And let me ask you to pray, morning evening and at all times, for that perfect coming, in all lands and hearts, of His glorious Kingdom, which will indeed be Peace on earth and Goodwill towards men. Then, in that better season, it will not be needful to ply human beings with inferior reasons for ceasing from

all strife: but the God of peace Himself will give peace always by all means.

Now the God of peace, That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

VI.

THE UNCHANGING SAVIOUR.

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."—HEB. xiii. 8.

I SUPPOSE nobody ever read that text, that says what it says about our Blessed Saviour, without rapidly passing to think, at least for a moment or two, about himself, the reader of the text. There are no words in holy Scripture which more expressly declare the unchangeableness of our Redeemer: and there is no text whose meaning is given more accurately or completely in our English Bible. What the inspired writer of this Epistle meant to say, was exactly this: that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." And who could read that, and not think, How unlike me, and mine!

It is just commonplaces that touch us most: unless we be exceptional persons, not easily touched at all. A commonplace means something that multitudes of human beings have felt; and a great many have said. And one of the most unutterably touching of all these, is the thought of the lapse of time; and the changes

which *that* works upon ourselves, and all we care for.

It is a little thing to say, that on this day a hundred years since, we, who are here to-day under this roof, had no being. There was such a day; dawn, mid-day, evening: but we were not here to know of it. It is a little thing to say, that on this day a hundred years hence, we shall every one of us be gone from this world. It is not the total change of birth and death which is the most touching thing: It is the gradual change which passes over us, while we are still the same people, going on through this life. You cannot see, in the care-worn, aging face of advancing years, the rosy face of the little child. And far greater than any change on outward features, is the change which time works upon the soul within, its feelings, its hopes, its views, its character. When you go back, in no more than middle age, to the home of your childhood; and the old time comes over you, with its countless remembrances of your early self, and the faces, the voices, the days that are gone: what can you say? There are thoughts too deep for tears; and infinitely incapable of expression.

Sometimes we have all thought, Now, we should like to stand still: stand still in this or that. These pleasant surroundings: these decided convictions: this healthful, cheerful, kindly, devout mood of soul: would that we could just keep them all! Your home: your little children: your dear friends of daily con-

verse: You wish that nobody would ever grow older; that nobody would ever die. You would like things in the Church, in the country, in the parish, to keep on as you have grown attached to them. But the irresistible tide moves onward. The old order must give place to the new. And in a hundred ways we are made to feel that we have not found our resting-place; that we never shall find it here.

So we come back to our text, which tells us of One Who never changes: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Not only does the association of utter unlikeness make us changing creatures in a changing world naturally pass from the one thought to the other: but there is the special interest with which we look at any quality which we ourselves have nothing like. There is, to us, something of sublimity even about things which, though passing away, are doing that so slowly, that in comparison with us, they are unchanging. A great building, which has outlasted by centuries the hands that raised it: a great mountain: the unchanged sea, that doubtless looks to our eyes and sounds in our ears as it did ages since to those gone and forgot: it is so with these. But in the case of such things, their immutability only repels us. It seems to bid us keep our distance. And we turn away now from them all, to think, for the remainder of our morning meditation, of our unchanging Redeemer: the same, indeed, throughout all ages: but specially the same now as

when we said, half lesson, half petition, our earliest prayers: the same through our own little yesterdays, more interesting to ourselves than all the past history of our Race: the same, while we bear the burden of our to-day: and, as we look out on the unknown years before us, the only One amid all our friends and all we love, concerning Whom we are sure that This shall be the same for ever!

Now, when we, with our limited powers and our small experience,—small experience indeed of all the things which are in heaven and earth,—try to think of our Saviour's unchangeableness absolutely, we are made to feel how little we can understand His nature. And I do not mean by this merely that the Godhead, and the relations existing between the three Divine Persons Who make up that mysterious Trinity in Unity, are inscrutable by our understanding: I mean that even in our Blessed Redeemer, in union with Whom is our life, our salvation, and Whom to know is our life eternal, it is so little a part we know, or can know here: there is so much about that kindest and most familiar face and heart which are utterly strange. When we were younger by a great deal, we used all to have an unexpressed but deep feeling that we should like to keep any very dear friend all to ourselves: and in those days, when a parent or near friend was all in all to us, we were startled when we got a glimpse of such a one's wider relations to many others; when we were made to feel how far we were

from being all in all to him. So we sometimes feel it with our Divine Saviour. He is everything to us: everything to our race: everything in our own little life and history and interests: but how little we understand of what the Infinite God the Son may be to other orders of beings, and in all the countless relations of this universe He made: and how humbly we must speak of Him, how reverently, in what simple adherence to the truth as it is revealed,—when we speak of His Being as it absolutely is,—and so of His Divine Immutability! To us, He is the Lamb of God, That takes away the sin of the world: He is Jesus Christ, in Whom we are commanded to believe and be saved. On this we rest: to this we hold. Yet we may be enabled to think of our Lord's Unchangeableness, in such a manner that though we shall fall short of all the truth, we shall not contradict any part of it: and our view will be sound and right as far as it goes, though doubtless there are infinite depths beyond it.

This, then, we may say confidently, thinking of our Redeemer's Unchangeableness: It is the unchangeableness of One who is Divine. It comes of this: That He possessed all perfection from the beginning, —perfection in wisdom, goodness, power, holiness, knowledge,—and so could not in any way change for the better. Neither could that change pass on Him, which is diminution, deterioration, decay. He could not grow better: He could not grow worse: He must

abide the same. With us on earth, it is all either waxing or lessening: changing to the greater or the less, for the better or the worse. And as with ourselves, so with all things round us. The days lengthen from the depths of winter, till they reach their limit, and then again draw in. The tree grows up from the slender sapling: matures into the great oak: then shrinks, dwindles, decays. The man grows up from the weakly infant: reaches the prime of bodily and mental strength: then falls into the yellow leaf of age. There is no standing still. And if we fancy we are standing still, in knowledge, wisdom, Christian attainment, it is to be feared we are going back in these. In the case of any created being, it would not be a good account of him to say what the text says. Supposing him to be, each succeeding day or year, the very same, why has he not been progressing? Surely it is no matter to be thought upon with complacency, that for so many months or years he has ceased to grow wiser and better. There was room for it. There were unattained degrees of goodness, wisdom, knowledge, to invite the most diligent pains. It is only as for One possessing perfection from the first, that it is commendation to call him what the text calls our Lord. This text must speak of One Who is verily and indeed God. Had He been only man, no matter how wise and good a man, the Holy Spirit would never have told us, as a thing to His praise, that all the years of His life had failed in the

least degree to improve Him; and that, let time go on as it might, it would never increase His experience, or mellow His wisdom. It is the law of the being of every creature, that it must be always moving. A rational immortal being must, and that for ever, be always drawing nearer God by growing more like Him, or going farther from God by becoming less like Him. Only God Himself abides without change!

Of course, you see that we might separate the single great truth of our Lord's unchangeableness, into many lesser truths, each with its solemn warning, each with its strong consolation. For He is unchangeable in all that He was and is: and He was and is many things. But let us confine our view to two: and meditate on these things: that our Redeemer is unchangeable in His Power, and unchangeable in His Love.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever, in His Power. And, if His power be thus unchangeable, this follows: that when we desire to estimate what it can do to-day, we may take the greatest work it ever did, and say, *Now* it is, and for ever it will be, great enough to do at least as much as that. I know we may say that our Saviour is Almighty: that He can do everything: and so do all we can ever need in time and eternity. But facts impress more than reasonings: and it is helpful to

us to have some standard by which to measure what otherwise we could very imperfectly know. Now think, that Christ is the Creator of the universe: All things were made by Him. He was able to do that inconceivably vast work, of which it bewilders us to think of the smallest part: He is almighty now, as on the first day. It was no spasmodic exertion of His power, made just for once, that made seas and mountains, suns and planets: His might is undiminished; and what it did then may assure us of what it can do yet,—do any day, or every day, for the good, the protection, the salvation of such as commit their souls to His charge. What a mighty Saviour is our Saviour! Think, that He Who told the story of the Prodigal Son, that He Who dictated the Lord's Prayer, that He Who took little children in His arms, was the Great Creator! My friends, I find it hard to realise, how almighty was and is Jesus of Nazareth, Who went about doing good. Somehow, His inexpressible goodness casts into the shade His mighty power. Even when He works a miracle, we do not think half so much of the strong Hand, as of the kindest Heart. You know, it is so with a human being: goodness conceals power. If you find, and every one says, that such a man is very amiable and good, you almost forget that he is very strong and able. But it is good for us, and cheering, to think that the merciful Saviour, Who always seems, somehow, so homelike and familiar,—our Brother in

frail humanity,—Who died for us, Who prays with us, Who looks on with sympathetic eye as we repent, as we pray, as we strive after what is good and holy,—is so great! What can He not do for us! His might hath been proved by trial up to the mark of making this universe: Less than *that* will lead us through troublesome life into peaceful immortality! He Who "can do everything" is surely "able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day!" And our lurking unbelief; our distrust that makes our burdens so heavy because we try to bear them ourselves instead of "casting all our care on Him;" surely it is silently yet sublimely rebuked, when we do but look round us upon this great Creation!

Yes; our merciful Saviour is the great Creator: and in His power is unchangeably the same. So we look back on that stupendous work with thankful faith. As for a human friend, it is often a very sad thing to look back on great exertions once put forth by him, and great works once done. Because the thought that comes next may be, How vain it would be for such a one to try to do as much now. Sorely failed; sorely failed! It is sadly the old man tells you what he could do once: the miles he could walk, the strain he could bear, the head-work he could go through. For there are the trembling hands, and the tottering feet: there is the mind with its enfeebled powers: He cannot do these things now. Yes in-

deed: to many a human being there is no sadder thought, than of what he could once do. You have come in, on a fair summer evening, where with the burning cheek and the over-bright eye, the young victim of the fell consumption is fading,—fading amid the world's green prime: and oh, if you could find it in *your* heart to pierce that sinking one with deeper sorrow, how more certainly than by speaking of departed days, of such summer evenings gone, when he or when she too shared the pleasant walk, the most vigorous and the brightest of all! Sore, sore contrast between the present and the past! But, thinking of a power that never can grow less, we can look with joy to the greatest work it ever wrought. For all it suggests to us is that *that* power can do, yet, at least as much: and so the work stands as a test and witness and measure of the reach of that power. Wherefore, my brethren, when we would realise for a little the might of that Saviour to Whom you have given your souls in charge, we look away, only for a moment, from the gracious Face we know: we look away from the homely Figure that walked this earth: we look away from garden and from cross. And we think of an Infinite Presence; and a limitless Energy and Skill; working through Immensity: doing, without an effort, that stupendous work which only God could do. We look back to the time when He stretched the North over the empty place, and did hang the earth upon nothing: when the morning

stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. I do not say that thus looking, we look at a pleasanter sight than that from which we turned away: Nay, it is not a thousandth part so pleasant: but, thus looking, we get some assurance of the measureless might of our Blessed Redeemer,—and never forget the Lamb as It had been slain!

And now, going on to meditate on the Unchangeableness of our Saviour's Love, we might follow, as to that, the like train of thought. To estimate (humbly) the depth and fulness of that love now, we might search out the instance in which it is recorded to have shone forth most kindly and warmly: and then we might say that it shines at least as kindly and warmly still; and that all that is required to make the gracious fountain well out as heretofore, is that again the like need for it should arise: the same distress and want be set before it. How sadly we should err, in estimating the kind-heartedness of a human being, if we were to take as the measure of it some occasion when he did some action of signal benevolence; and to say to ourselves, Well, we may depend upon it that at any time, his kindness will at least come up to that mark! How often some capricious gush of feeling in a world-hardened heart, has led to some sudden act of beneficence, that stands out a bright exception in a selfish and bad life! There is a story told,—no

doubt it owes its effect much to the way in which it is told (resembling in that all other stories), but I believe few could read it without emotion,—of one kind deed, one redeeming trait that softens to the heart the history of as selfish and cruel a man as ever waded to fame through blood: but *he* would have sadly erred in his calculation, who should have thought he would always find Napoleon in that soft mood in which he talked so kindly to the poor captive sailor, and set him free. And without going to the instance of people who are very great and very bad, every one knows on what a number of little fortuitous circumstances may depend the mood in which you actually find any human being with whom you have to deal. You have gone to talk with a man who bore the character of being very kind, and considerate of all: but you came upon him when he was specially overdriven, and worried with a multitude of things of which you knew nothing: and you found him, perhaps, exceedingly impatient and irritable; and you did not get in the least the reception you had made sure of. And beyond the uncertainty as to what we shall find any one to actually be, that comes of the variability of temper and present mood; there comes to many a one, going on through the hardening wear of years, a steady deterioration in all those features of character which are kindly, guileless, and loveable. It is often a sad falling off from generous, sanguine, enthusiastic youth, to cautious, calculating, selfish

after-life, not without its share of that prudence which verges to baseness. Sometimes one who has spent his days in a simpler career, has come with the old feeling to some early companion, who has pushed his way in the great world, thinking to find his old friend still the same; but only to meet the calculating eye and the altered manner, that check his warm remembrances and freeze up his warm greeting. Now, in a world of these things: in a world where we soon learn that we cannot count on even those dearest to us being always at their best and kindest; how grateful should the assurance be that our Saviour's love and mercy and goodness are unchangeably the same! We never shall find, going to the throne of grace, that He has turned impatient and weary of us: we never shall find Him so busied with His own concerns that He has no time nor heart to think of ours: we never shall find in Him a trace of that wilfulness which cleaves to poor humanity even when we are ashamed of it, which makes a human being who is kind and patient and reasonable one day, fretful and chilly and capricious the next: we cannot go wrong when we take Him as He said or did what touches us as His very kindest, and then say that to-day and for ever, every soul that goes to Him in faith and penitence, will find Him kind and gracious as then.

For measure of His power, we thought of Creation: For example of His kindness, we may open the Gospel history anywhere. And, desiring so to

"know the love of Christ" that we may confide all that concerns us to Him, possibly each has his own little point in the compassionate story, that comes most touchingly home to himself. We might stand by as He blessed the little children; and see how they, sharp judges and readers of the heart if not the head, came so naturally to His knee. We might look at Him, bending over the death-bed of the Ruler's little girl; and waking her from her cold sleep with words so gently sympathetic, that if she lived to be gray, that little girl never would forget, that the kindest words that ever were said to her, were said, not by her mother, but by her Saviour! We might mark, not without awe, in the thought that Christ has wept over souls He could not save, how, drawing near to Jerusalem at that last passover-season, He mourned over the guilty city that would not be redeemed. Or, solemnly recalling Gethsemane and Calvary, the unknown Agony, the desertion, and death upon the cross; and remembering that it was love to man that made Him willingly drink that cup of sorrow; we might rest in this, that in this hour, His love is warm as then. For we know that now, unchanged and unchangeable, in the glorified Redeemer above, abides all the love that impelled the suffering Redeemer below: and all the confidence, all the implicit trust and assurance of kind welcome, with which we think we could have gone to His feet when He dwelt among men, we may bring yet to Him,

Who, though cut off for all these centuries from the sight of His people on earth, we know is and must be gracious and good as then: because in mercy and love, as in all things beside, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever!"

My friends, the changes that have come over ourselves in the past, are infinitely touching to think of. That human being must have in great measure cast off his humanity, who can really think, without some stirring of heart, of his own departed days. But yet more solemn than the past, is the veiled future. Awful, indeed, are the possibilities of future time. We shall change, greatly change: our children, our friends, all our possessions, all we care for, must change. So much the more we cleave to this one thing: our Saviour changes not. He is Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. And we do, by the grace of the Blessed Spirit, choose Him for our Portion. He has taken us, we humbly trust: and He will keep us. He has taken, we humbly trust, all who are dear to us: and they are safe in His Almighty and All-merciful care. We are all minded, dear friends, surely; all firmly purposed; to abide His faithful servants to our life's end. And that we may do this, we will not fail, day by day, in all our prayers, to ask for the indwelling in our hearts of the Blessed and Holy Spirit!

VII.

THE PECULIAR PEOPLE.

"A peculiar people."—1 PETER ii. 9.

THIS is a Christian country. It is so called, because the human beings who live in it are, by profession, Christians. If you ask any native of Britain what he is by religion, unless you chance on some very exceptional person, the answer will be, A Christian. Possibly, indeed, the answer may go into much more minute detail: and the person asked may tell you something that has nothing at all to do with the central essence of religion;—such as that he is Presbyterian or Episcopalian, churchman or dissenter. But, speaking generally, it may be said that all about us are nominally Christians. And, talking in this loose way, you call people Christians without in the least considering whether or not they have those characteristics which (if the New Testament be right) every Christian has. To call a man a Christian in this way conveys no more as to the actual state of his heart and life, than to call him an Englishman or a

Scotchman. It is merely a well-understood way of expressing something perfectly external about a man's position.

But in the Christian land, and the Christian population, there is an inner circle; consisting of those as applied to whom the name means, not nothing, but something. There is an inner circle, of those who claim to be really converted people: Christians not in name only, but in reality. There are certain well-understood ways in which people tell all who know about them, that they claim to be such. By becoming communicants, and going to the Lord's table, they do this. By regularly attending church, they do this. All of you who are here, profess to be Christians indeed: that is, not merely to have been born in a community nominally Christian, but to have personally taken your stand. You believe in Christ, and look to Him for salvation. And in your daily life, there are certain rules by which you guide your conduct, because that is Christ's will. There are various truths which you could not have found out for yourselves, which you believe because He taught them.

Now we are told in the text one thing about such as you: about all real Christians. They are "a peculiar people:" that is, they are markedly different from people who are not Christians. The exact meaning of the words St Peter wrote is, a people specially God's own; and distinctively marked as such. To be

peculiar, in the sense in which the English word is used in common talk, is to be odd: to be eccentric: to be singular: It generally conveys the idea of being unlike other people in petty and unworthy things and ways, as to which a sensible man would not think it worth while to differ from the rest of his race. But that is not the idea the text conveys. No reasonable person needs to be told that it is not an affected and probably a silly individuality which marks the Christian as "peculiar" in the sense of the New Testament. And if it were not that facts show that it is very necessary to say it, you would have said too that it was needless to say that the text does not mean that Christians, as a class, ought to be known by affected differences from the common way of the world in little outward matters: such as dress, modes of expression, tones of voice and the like. And yet there have been people, in our own country,—people ignorant indeed of the very alphabet of Christianity, though puffed up with the most hateful spiritual self-conceit,—who dared to sit in judgment on their fellow-creatures and pronounce whether they were Christians or not,—taking for tests by which to go such things as whether they talked (at least on religious subjects) in certain ugly whining and canting tones of voice: and whether they had the command of a number of unnatural slang phrases about religion, which took the place of the shibboleth of old. Now, even where the outward things esteemed as marks of

Christian people have been of a less contemptible and absurd kind than these,—have consisted in little bits of social self-denial, forswearing this or that innocent piece of amusement, tabooing this or that insignificant piece of what looked like ostentation—as when good people have maintained that a Christian might drive his carriage but ought not to have his arms painted on the door of it,—all such tests are utterly bad. They are foolish in themselves: they afford matter of ridicule to the outer world: they invariably tend, towards making people rest in these little things, attaching a silly importance to them, and forgetting matters of real and vital importance. A person who holds that he or probably she has the distinguishing signs of a true believer because he (or she) will not go to a little party, or will not take a quiet walk after church on Sunday, may not unfrequently be found cherishing a spirit of self-conceit on account of fancied spiritual superiority: likewise admitting a most uncharitable and suspicious temper, which appears in the unlovely form of evil-speaking, and telling ill-set falsehoods to the prejudice of those who think differently: quite failing to see that these are the weightier matters, and the surer signs.

But, putting aside surface differences, let us get on to deeper characteristics. And knowing, as we all know, that there are worldly principles on which worldly people act, which we feel to be in many cases low and bad principles, and not at all such as

Christ would approve; I want to ask, Is there, in most professing Christians; Is there, in ourselves; really any difference? Are we, who call ourselves Christian people, quite different from those who do not pretend to be Christian people; in those respects in which the New Testament shows us they are quite wrong? Because if it be not so, there is something amiss. Things are not in a right and healthy state. We want a note of the true and better life. It is too plain to need any proof, that if we are exactly like those who are quite worldly people, and who never pretend to be anything else, we cannot possibly be Christ's "peculiar people." My friends, here is a matter to be looked into very seriously. Here is a test of how we stand with God. May God's Holy Spirit help us to thoroughly probe this thing; gravely, honestly, and searchingly.

First, take Controversy: a common thing and a keen thing in these days.

We all know how merely-worldly men act, speak, write, and feel, when they get into that prolonged and excited kind of discussion, and difference, upon some matter felt to be deeply interesting, which is what we all understand by controversy. The opposing persons in *that*, do not want truth: they want victory. They do not want to convince an opponent: but to make him angry. They have generally some underhand and concealed reason for holding and enforcing the opinion they do, which they carefully keep back;

because if it were known, it would be extremely little to their credit. They do not honestly say what they think: they do not honestly tell you their reasons for thinking it. It is commonly their own profit for which they are in fact contending, while they dishonestly pretend to be standing up for a principle. And the manner in which the controversy is conducted, is for the most part as evil as the motives which inspired it. Unfair: malignant: dishonest: *that* is what controversy is, or tends to be, among those who never pretend to conduct it Christianly. The controversialist, in letters, or in politics, or æsthetics, sets himself to misrepresent what has been said by his opponent: to twist the opponent's words to a meaning which he knows quite well the opponent never intended: to show that the opponent is a knave, or perhaps a fool: possibly to blacken the opponent's character: sometimes simply to overwhelm him with abuse: in short, by any means, fair or unfair, to silence the opponent and put him down. I speak in the hearing of many who know the world well: and I ask them, with confidence, whether what I have said be not substantially true.

Now, what like should controversy be, when it arises among the peculiar people? Of course, quite different from all this.

In your simplicity, you might even doubt whether controversy could arise among Christ's peculiar people at all. But if it did, of course, there would be great

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kindness upon either side: great fairness: an anxious desire to do an opponent all justice, by setting out his views with scrupulous accuracy, and giving him all due credit for honest intention. Of course, there never could be so much as a word intended merely to wound. The desire of each party to the discussion would be to gain his brother: if he were wrong, to set him right. And in either disputant, there would be a humble sense that he himself might be wrong: an always present remembrance that human faculties are limited,—meaning by *that*, not merely (as is the way with some) that your opponent's faculties are limited, but likewise your own. Doubtless, too, the entire controversy would be calmed and sweetened through this; that it would be begun, continued, and ended, with many prayers.

My friends, knowing how the fact is, one has not heart to go on. All this sounds so much like a wild piece of irony. Oh what a caricature of all this, religious controversy has all but invariably been! Is it not certain, that if the controversies of those who profess to be Christ's peculiar people differ at all from the controversies of merely worldly men, it is in that they are far more flagrantly malignant and dishonest and unchristian? It is humbling, it is sickening, to think how Christian men, whom one is anxious to esteem, once the evil spirit of religious hatred is aroused, have spoken and written about one another. Such unfairness: such rancour: such suspicion: such

uncharitableness: such incapacity to believe that an opponent can be honest: such calculating endeavours, reminding you of a bloodhound that has laid himself on the track, by every uncandid fetch to fix upon him the odium of some grievous heresy which he never dreamt of: such willingness to receive and propagate the most stupid and malignant falsehoods, if they seem likely to do him harm: such things as these, have we not all seen far too much of! "Charity," St Paul tells us, "thinketh no evil:" but the religious controversialist commonly thinketh no good.

It may be hoped that most of you have not had the experience of that peculiar publication termed "a religious newspaper," which some present have enjoyed. Such a publication claims to be conducted by Christian men, on Christian principles: yet some of you know that it has passed into a proverb, for all that is unprincipled, abusive, and malignant. There has been such a case, as that a publication of that character was conducted on the rule, that however clearly it might be detected and exposed in a lie, the lie was never to be confessed or retracted. It paid better to stick to it. But how deplorable a fact, that good men, well knowing this, went on reading and supporting that wicked print, because it maintained their peculiar opinions! I shall say no more of the meetings for debate of many men, professing to be Christian men, than that it is happy that so few outside people

take the trouble of attending them. For wrath, in all its least creditable forms: revenge, in some of its meanest forms: reckless accusations: evrey kind of ill temper, from that hateful temper which sulks, up to the less unworthy which flies out in temporary ravings; may be seen from time to time in such assemblies.

You see then that unless in some rarely-strung and nurtured man here and there, not much of the especial character of the Christian appears in Christians when engaged in controversy. And as it is plain that the temptation of controversy is too much for most men's Christian principle, and does in fact subject it to what is called in mechanics a breaking strain; it is wisdom in Christian people to keep out of it. But there are things which it is impossible for most men to keep out of, which are very searching tests of character: and in which the characteristics of Christ's peculiar people ought to come out strongly. Let us next take Business. I have heard a man of no small practical sagacity say, that you never know a man till you come to do business with him. This consists with one's own experience. And a great many do not come pleasantly out of that test. It is to be lamented that when you say a thing is a test of a man, it generally means that it brings out the worst of him:—brings out worse than you had fancied was in him.

Now, we all know how perfectly worldly people, with no Christian principle at all, frequently behave in transacting worldly business. Their great object is to make it as profitable as possible: and though in many cases there is a principle of high integrity which scorns profit made by unfair means, yet very often indeed that is not so. There is a maxim of English law, which hints the risks you run in average mercantile dealing: It is expressed in Latin; but its meaning is, *Let the buyer look out for himself.** A great deal is suggested by that. It is not in any way consistent with the Christian ideal, of loving your neighbour as yourself. It conveys significantly that at the least, if you do not take care of yourself in worldly dealing, no one else will: it conveys significantly what some of us have probably found, that the simple-minded and inexperienced, making a bargain, may get terribly the worst of it. Then beyond that taking advantage which is all within the law, and which is no worse than sharp practice, or smartness; there is in this world's dealing a vast amount of downright dishonesty. There is over-reaching in all shapes: under-rating a thing when buying, over-rating a thing when selling: there is the dismal national disgrace of the adulteration of food, of short weights and measures: there are some vocations which are little better than systematised lying and cheating. These things, in their worst forms, are mainly con-

* *Caveat emptor.*

fined to our great cities: but wherever sinful human nature is, they may now and then be found.

How then about the peculiar people, in matters of business? Here is a point at which their special characteristics should come out very prominently indeed.

It is a small thing to say that a Christian, acting out the principles of the New Testament, could not possibly be guilty of falsehood, or of misrepresentation, to get any conceivable gain. There would be far more than that. Loving his neighbour as himself, he would of course be exactly as anxious, in every dealing, to provide for his neighbour's interest, as for his own. The utmost fairness; the most transparent candour; would be in his heart and his words. He would be most anxious that you should know all the faults of the thing he is selling to you. He would not allow you to prejudice yourself by giving him an unduly good bargain. You could send a child to deal with that man; and feel that so doing you were safe!

Now let me say, thankfully, that I have known those who, in all their business dealings, were as good as that: Those whom you could not even imagine as taking an unfair advantage of any one. But on the other hand, I have known people, claiming to be Christian people, between whom, and mere worldly men, there was just no difference at all in these things. It does not by any means certainly follow,

that because you are going to do business with one of God's peculiar people, you will find in him any peculiarity, in this respect, marking him off from other men. He is just like the rest; and not even like the better sort among the rest. And possibly, even, you have known those who made a very loud and ostentatious Christian profession, who were just as grasping, just as unscrupulous, just as ready to sail exceedingly close to the wind, as the most worldly among worldly men. I do not mention the case of such as have devoured widows' houses and poor children's little portions, while for a pretence they made long prayers and loud ones: because the hypocrite is happily an exceptional man; and Christianity is not responsible for him. But I ask you whether it be not a grievous blot on the Christian character of some in whom we believe there may be found the root of the matter, that in a large portion of their life's occupation there is little or nothing of that worthy and elevated peculiarity which we might reasonably expect. There is something grievously amiss. It ought not so to be.

Well: but as controversy need come into the life of few, business with its special temptations lies out of the way of many. Let me suggest a third testing matter which probably will in various ways put all to the proof. Let us think of the wide and far-reaching question of Self-Seeking.

In this world, being what it is, the wise and Christian man must indeed, in due degree, care for himself, and look out for himself and his interest: otherwise he will, in the throng and the race, be driven to the wall, or even trampled under foot. This is a world in which it is quite necessary that a man should hold his own if he wants to keep it: *that* is a universal law. Then helplessness and silliness are not Christian duties. Neither is it any man's duty to sit still in a sort of fatalism, believing that what is good for him will come without his seeking or effort, by the direct interposition of God. A Christian may, and must, see what those things are which he knows would please him, and which he believes would profit him: and he may, and ought to, try by fair means to get these.

But that is not self-seeking in the bad sense. The Christian duty here is a matter of degree. And though it may be difficult to lay down a distinct theory in words, neither the Christian himself, nor those who look at him, have the least difficulty in fact in discerning when any one's life becomes a life of self-seeking, and when it keeps clear of that condemnation. And assuredly here is a respect in which Christ's peculiar people should be known. It is surely not fit or right, that a believer in Christ, who declares that his best treasure is laid up above, and that what he feels to be the one thing needful is salvation through a crucified Redeemer and a sancti-

fying Spirit, should be just as keen and eager about worldly profit and advancement, as any merely worldly man. You should be aware of the difference between the two. There should be a composure, a resignation to God's will, an assurance that all things must work together for his good, about the true Christian, which in this anxious and eager and fluttered world would be very peculiar and rare and blessed things. And after doing his best by fair means to compass right ends, and all with a due regard to the claims and deserts of others, the true Christian, as he did not too eagerly desire worldly good, so will not be greatly cast down if he fail of it. He has a treasure above: he has a strong consolation within: and he never forgets that a life in this world, in which you fail of every worldly end you ever wished for, yet which prepares you for a better world and a holier and happier life, is not a failure! Kindly and helpful towards others: candid and unenvious towards competitors who surpass himself: not feverishly eager about any worldly prize or distinction: cheerfully resigned to either event; such should the Christian be. And doubtless if they were so in a world like this, Christ's people would be indeed a peculiar people, strongly marked off from other men.

Now, can any average believer look for a moment at the ideal of what he ought to be, without feeling his own heart condemn him? Ah, how very different is the fact! How worldly-minded, how self-

seeking, how eager for earthly gain, how crushed by earthly disappointment, most Christian people are! You look in vain in others: do you not look in vain in yourself; for any substantial difference at all. You are affected by worldly events just as worldly people are. It really makes no difference at all on the way in which you take what happens to you, that Christ lived and died, and that the Blessed Spirit came! Your burden is as heavy: you live as much amid care's unthankful gloom. You are as eager about some little success; and as mortified by some little slight or failure. You say that one thing is needful: but you live as though there were fifty things which you could as little do without. I do not wish to ask too much: I do not wish to propose either for you or me, a standard far too high for poor human nature. I know that when tried by the searching test of this world's interests, the very best believer will own, in penitence and humiliation, how grievously his real mood of mind and heart comes short of being what it ought to be. There is an anxious temperament, coming mainly of physical causes, which keeps many Christians on the flutter or the rack, and from which they never will be set free till the fleshly vesture falls from around their spirit. And it is dishonest to pretend that worldly circumstances, with their awful influence upon spiritual growth and character, are not things that fitly have a mighty weight upon the heart of every one who has to think not merely of himself,

but of those for whom he cares infinitely more. Yet, with all that, we must strive and pray that we be not worldly-minded: the cares of this world choke the word. And never is self-seeking more contemptible, than when it is thinly disguised under the hypocritical pretence of a disinterested and unworldly spirit; of high and magnanimous motives. We have doubtless seen *that*, in professing Christians of loud profession. They could not grasp some worldly advantage, without asking you to believe that they did it purely for the sake of others, and for *their* profit. There is something that soothes one's natural irritation at a contemptible piece of hypocrisy in the reflection, that probably no one ever believed them.

You know well, all of you, that these things said to you to-day are true things. And they are humbling thoughts which have been present to our minds for the last half-hour. There is not one of us but must have felt them as humbling, if his conscience be in any degree awake. Ah brethren, how we come short of our high profession! And even if we have the good hope through grace in us, it would not do that our fellow-men should know us by our fruits! What more then can we do, but come anew to the Blessed Redeemer, whose blood brings pardon; and to the Blessed Spirit Who can sanctify these poor sinful souls!

VIII.

THE NEEDLESS SHAME.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—ROM. i. 16.

THERE are various thoughts that come into one's mind, looking at these words.

Times are changed since St Paul wrote them: greatly changed. It was a new thing then, the gospel: it was a struggling thing: it had antecedents which were against it. And Rome was a great place then: mighty in power, the metropolis of the world as no place ever has been since Rome went down: and doubtless the greater people, and the specially cultivated people, there, had all the disposition which is found yet in people who live in a metropolis, to look down, as from a higher elevation, upon men and upon systems that had their origin in some out-of-the-way provincial region. That Judea should think to teach and enlighten Rome, would seem to many a quite extravagant notion. And it looks as if the name of Rome, and the thought of Rome, were what led the Apostle to make the declaration in the text: as though saying that with a hundred things present

to his mind which *that* would suggest, and which there was no need to go over, he yet was not in the least inclined to look with changed feelings on the faith he had held and taught in humbler places and among simpler folk. It is not unnatural to man, that things with which we used to be quite satisfied and pleased, look entirely different when we have come to know grander things: and that homely friends and even relations are dropped, as something to be ashamed of, when people have pushed their way into society of more dignity and importance. But as for St Paul, the gospel looked just as good and noble with the thought of Rome before him, as it used to do when he thought only of how it would do in humbler places. He says, "As much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also: for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

Times are changed, we said, since St Paul wrote the words. The gospel is not a new thing now, as it was then: it is an old story, though always good news. And it is not a struggling thing now: at least not in the sense in which it was then. Possibly one might be inclined, just at the first thought, if one heard any person uttering such words at this present day, to reply, Really that does not say much for your moral courage: we cannot see anything very heroic in your not being ashamed of the gospel of Christ: Pray, why should you be ashamed of it? Are you to

be ashamed of it because it is God's truth for man's salvation: because it is the only instrumentality that can purify and ennoble our life here, and prepare us for a better life hereafter: because it teaches a religion that has enlisted among its believers the best understandings and the best hearts that ever have been reckoned among human kind? Are you to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, when you remember Who and What *He* was?

We might, perhaps, if we spoke without much thought, or without remembering at all a great many things we have seen since we were children, say that in these days no man, unless he were a contemptible fool, could ever be ashamed of the gospel of Christ at all. But it was different when St Paul wrote the words: it demanded courage then to make the declaration he made. We can imagine, very well, that many a man who would be forward enough to make a profession of Christianity now, when Christianity has grown an eminently respectable thing; a thing of which respectful acknowledgment is made by all reputable classes of society, whether religious or not; a thing which, rightly or wrongly, has established itself, and gained a footing which you must shatter the empire ere you dislodge it from; many a quiet easy-going man who does not shrink now from avowing his belief in the gospel of Christ, would have held off from having much to do with it in its day of small things. Probably that race of human beings,

who are commonly called *safe men*, who in all ages of the Church have largely engrossed its temporal rewards, would, in the days when St Paul wrote my text, have been specially unwilling to be regarded as in the same boat with such a disturber and innovator. For St Paul had not the slightest regard for an old thing, unless it were a true thing and a good thing. He was a brave man, St Paul, living in the days he lived in, and writing to the sort of people he was writing to, when he said (and we all know he meant what he said) "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." For in those days Christ crucified was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." Our Blessed Master's Name had not then gathered the sublime associations of all inexpressible goodness and greatness which have now made it a Name which is above every name: it then only designated one but recently put to a malefactor's death of character the most degrading. The Cross was then an emblem of shame: it was the accursed tree: men did not know that ages would come in which that form should be deemed of all the most sacred; not to be hidden away, as something by all means to be forgotten, but blazoned before all who had eyes to see: recalled by the very ground-plan of every church, borne on high by every gable, carried aloft by every spire and dome, as though silently yet unceasingly to signify how Christian people gloried in the cross of Christ.

These are some natural reflections which might arise in our minds, on first glancing at the text. Perhaps they are *the* natural reflections under the circumstances. It needed resolution in St Paul to say his famous words: but it needs no great moral courage to say as much now. Nobody is ashamed of the gospel of Christ now-a-days. A man, in a Scotch parish, might hesitate a little before he would frankly confess to you that he never went to church, never was a communicant, never read his Bible, never prayed: but no one would be ashamed to tell you that Sunday after Sunday found him in his place in the sanctuary; that morning and evening he had family prayers in his house; that on every opportunity he came to the communion-table. Good taste makes people backward to cry themselves up: but in simple folk, in whom that eminently artificial refinement does not exist, one has witnessed a tendency to bring out, with a child-like pride not without something touching in it, how much their life is influenced by the precepts and spirit of the gospel of Christ. But what I desire that we may all be enabled to do, this day, is to look deeper into all this. Let us seriously think whether there be not something very common among professing Christians, which is exceedingly like being ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Let us look into ourselves, into our own feelings and conduct, and think whether there may not be times, and places, and circles of society, in which Christians, both old and

young, are tempted, and that strongly, to sink the Christian for the time being; to hide their colours; to be very quiet about their Christian profession; and willingly to pass for being no better than other people: no more precise in conduct, no more guarded in what they say, no less sharp at taking up a doubtful jest, no more anxious that their life should be squared to the morality of the Sermon on the Mount and the example of the Saviour. In short, brethren, let us see, with a suitable gravity and earnestness, whether all of us have not sometimes been what at a first glance we might think no reasonable man ever could be,—"ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

When St Peter denied his Master, declaring to the little crowd in the court of the High Priest's palace "I know not the man;" that was not exactly being ashamed of Christ. Fear, not shame, was the thing in the Apostle's heart, which led to that sad failure. It was not that he shrunk from the derision of the little crowd; but that he was afraid some one in it might give information to the authorities which would bring him into bodily danger. Now, when any one in these days is ashamed of the gospel of Christ, no doubt the end to which that feeling would lead, is exactly that which is expressed in St Peter's words, "I know not the man." But the inward feeling leading towards that end is different: it is not the

fear, generally speaking, of any substantial harm, but only the dread of being laughed at. And the outward manifestation of this inward feeling may very seldom be permitted to go so far as it did with the Apostle. Yet let us think: Have we never, in any place, upon any occasion, among any set of people, been aware of a feeling which if it was anything, was shame of our Saviour; shame of our Christian profession; shame of the gospel of Christ? I do not ask Whether we have ever in so many words denied our Master: No one here would do that: I believe there is not one professed Christian in this congregation but would, if it were directly put to him, even in the most godless company, and with the greatest certainty of banter and ridicule following the confession, yet confess that he believed in Christ, looked for mercy through Him, tried to obey His precepts, and prayed oftentimes in His Name. I believe there is not one here but would, if he were fairly driven into a corner, declare and avow his Christian belief. Yet I fear, too, that the feeling has not been unfamiliar to many at some stages in their life, of being ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Possibly some, who would, if need were, confess the Redeemer at the peril of life as did old confessors and martyrs, have at some time, and in some company, cowardly shrunk away from the confession of their faith; under no weightier temptation than the jest or laughter of some contemptible creature whose jest stamped him

as a fool. Surely the consciences of some here are now silently recalling occasions, on which they felt a guilty and a shameful shame of the very last thing in the world to be ashamed of.

Did it ever happen to any here, a workman among his fellow-workmen, a soldier amid his fellow-soldiers, a student among his fellow-students, to find himself in a company where religion and religious people were spoken of with undisguised contempt, and esteemed as a butt for profane witticisms? Of course, there are circles of polite society, likewise of society which is not polite at all, where, if a man soberly and deliberately said, that the great thing he was trying to do day by day, was to reach after greater likeness to Christ and to live more to God and unseen things, he would be greeted with derision, more or less avowed. Let us be thankful that such circles are few now, compared with what they were even within the memory of man. Now, did it ever happen to you to be thrown into such a company as that, where all serious things are treated with levity; and where to have announced you as an earnest Christian would have made you the derision of the godless persons who composed it: And have you never, in circumstances like these, kept quite quiet about your religion, and allowed yourself to be supposed to think and feel as the scoffers around you thought and felt? Ah, my brethren, you may call this what you please; but there can be little question what St Paul would have

called your conduct. *He* would have called it being "ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

Then, have you not sometimes done a thing which your own conscience condemned, so that you felt unhappy all the while you were doing it,—because it was commonly done by worldly people around you, and because you were afraid of being esteemed an over-precise, narrow-minded, and canting person, if you did not do as they did? Now, when you look back over your past life, can you not see there a sad series of small sins and follies, omissions of duty, and transgressions of God's law, done for fear of what just those might think, whose opinion was worth nothing: done not because you felt the least enjoyment or satisfaction in doing so, but just because you were ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and had not courage to say boldly that *that* must be the rule and guide of your life, no matter how much amused or surprised those around you might be? And it is sad to think how wofully soon this influence, which is so powerful a weapon in the hand of our great Adversary, is brought into play, to the hurt and detriment even where not the ruin of immortal souls. It is deep-set in the human heart, this tendency to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ; and it comes out early. What makes the young school-boy, when he goes away from being under a parent's care, and is thrown among a crowd of young ones of his own age; what makes *him* leave off his prayers, leave off his

daily reading of his Bible, and take to a great many little pieces of juvenile folly and even wickedness which are the ominous beginning of a folly and wickedness more mature? Is it because he finds any pleasure in all that? No: he is unhappy all the while: he knows he is doing wrong: his conscience makes him miserable. But then he is ashamed of the gospel of Christ: he does not want his companions to know how afraid he used to be of doing wrong: and for fear of being laughed at by the worst, idlest, stupidest, most contemptible blockheads in the school, he does many a wrong thing which it only makes him unhappy to do. And so it begins in boyhood: this wretched truckling to the opinion of those whose opinion is worth nothing: this being ashamed of the gospel of Christ: What wonder if year after year the tendency grows stronger, to conform to the current ways of acting and thinking: and when in Rome (as the proverb says) to do as is done there; however silly, sinful, and despicable, all that doing may be! You all know how in days happily past in this country, many a man went out to fight a duel, stamping himself a fool by giving into a custom even more irrational than it was wicked, just because he lacked the moral courage to say manfully and at once that he would not do what was sinful and idiotic, however stringently an absurd and godless unwritten law required him to do *that*. You know too, how many a youth, going to one of our great cities, begins to neglect all his home-

taught ways of attention to the means of grace, and to outward religious duty, for fear of the ridicule of the most worthless of his companions. I remember well, when I was at College, hearing one student say to another, as something to his discredit, "Oh, you are the kind of man that would read a chapter of the Bible morning and evening." But the student who said that had chanced upon the wrong man to speak to in that fashion; and he got an answer which stopped his talking in that way for a long time after. But no doubt that profane talker was a sample of many more, who exercise a very evil influence upon the weaker among their contemporaries. I have known of those who under that evil influence left off going to church, or turned very irregular and indifferent in their attendance there: and I cannot but declare that in my observation, irregularity and indifference about attending God's public worship, specially in the young, indicate, and where not indicate, tend to, utter disregard of anything like vital religion. I have known the like influence, in other countries, lead the young little by little to contemn God's holy day, though with a heart that sorely misgave them for a while at first: all for fear that some people would smile at these narrow precisians with their obsolete Scotch notions. And in short, every time you do what you know is wrong, and contrary to the mind and will of your Saviour, through fear of the ridicule of those around you, sure

I am that this is what St Paul would have called being "ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

And to sum the matter up, brethren: Whenever you shrink from owning Christ for your Lord and Master, because you are among people who hold vital godliness in little regard: Whenever you hear religion ridiculed, and let the matter pass in silence: Whenever you hear a good man abused or a bad man approved of, and do not enter your resolute dissent: Whenever, on due occasion, you shrink from testifying your faith in Christ crucified, because there are those present who are so scientific or philosophical that they would regard you with a well-bred contempt, that seems to say "Are you so old-fashioned and behind the age as that:" Whenever, finally, "the dread of banter or ridicule keeps you back from giving your testimony, whether by word or deed, in favour of true religion, and against all that is opposed to it;" in every such case as that, if there be meaning in words at all, you are in very deed showing yourself ashamed of the gospel of Christ. And common as the sin may be; well as I doubt not all of you have recognised it now that so much has been said in description of it; surely it is sad evidence of the weakness of even sanctified human nature that such a sin should be at all? Is it not, in truth, just a lesser apostasy? Is it not a symptom which shows a pliancy of disposition in the hands of temptation, that augurs sadly how poor a confession *we* should

have made in the days when St Paul wrote this text: when imprisonments and tortures might have been the impulses to denial of our Master, instead of the fool's battery of taunts and sneers? And if it be hard to forgive or forget the rare one in the days of martyrdom who broke down and failed,—few, God be praised for His sustaining grace, very few,—yet there were some whom the lions in the arena, the red-hot chair, the ghastly dungeon, drove to apostasy from Christ: what shall we say of him who shrinks in shame from the confession of the Saviour that died for him, impelled by no weightier impulse than the laughter of a fool? For I need not tell you that this ridicule of religion, which is the great cause of what among Christians now may be called being ashamed of the gospel of Christ, cannot by possibility proceed from any but the fool in the strictest force of the word;—but pitiful contemptible creatures of no mind at all, and whose opinion is not worth the weight of a feather. There might be some excuse for being ashamed even of the gospel of Christ, if those whose contempt was the cause of our shame, were persons whose opinion or character was worthy of any respect whatever. But it needs no proof that such a thing cannot be: it needs no proof that even a worldly or a godless man, if he be a man of sense, must in his inmost heart approve the conduct of the believer in taking more care of his soul than he does himself. And what shall be said, then, of the Christian, who,

though knowing that God, and all the glorified intelligences above us, think as he does about the importance of salvation and the duty of doing right, yet feels ashamed to confess that he dares not do what God forbids: feels ashamed to confess that he desires to be happy for ever: feels ashamed to confess that he is seeking to be happy for ever, in the only way in which it is possible he should be so! And graver thoughts still suggest themselves, when we recall such words as those of our Blessed Redeemer Himself,—"Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

I have been anxious, in what has been said, to take such a view of the sin and folly which the text suggests to us, as may be of practical use to the mass of a Christian congregation. There is another fashion in which men may be guilty of it, in which the possibility of guilt is confined to a single order of men: to such as are called to preach the gospel of Christ. If such, in deference to the prejudices, or the peculiar theological views, of any of their hearers, —specially of the more influential and intelligent of their hearers,—hold back the declaration of any vital part of God's whole counsel,—being themselves well assured of its truth, but thinking or knowing that it will not be acceptable,—doubtless they fall grievously under this blame. No doubt, there are unwise

preachers, who, after giving offence mainly through their own want of sense and tact and temper, flatter themselves that they are suffering the offence of the Cross: and no doubt, in declaring God's mind, every care should be taken to set it forth in the most wise and attractive way, which is commonly the fairest and truest way. It generally comes of mere coarseness of nature in the preacher, if the declaration of what is unquestionably Christ's gospel is made repulsive and angular, and such as the common feeling of even unsanctified humanity rises against. But to keep back the declaration of Christ's Godhead because there is an influential Unitarian in church: or to suppress the clear statement of the Personality and Divinity of the Holy Spirit, or of the Atoning Sacrifice of Christ, or of the actual prevalence of Prayer; you believing all these things, but knowing that there will be those in church who do not believe them, or who at least would like best to hear nothing about them; is cowardly and unfaithful in the highest degree. Let me add, that I believe such cowardice and unfaithfulness are very rare: that probably they hardly ever occur at all. It really requires no courage at all, now, to preach the gospel faithfully. The courage, though a wretched kind of it, would be in preaching anything else. And I cannot but say that some memories may recall cases in which the charge of such unfaithfulness was very persistently made; but in which time, just though slow, did in the end

most strongly disprove it. You must preach Christ's blessed gospel, you who will be called to do so,—wisely (which does not mean sneakily); yet manfully (which does not mean insolently). Grievous is the condemnation of the minister who, through fear of man or shame of his message, fails to set out all gospel truth fully. But there are few things more contemptible, than to set out gospel truth, as though gratuitously seeking a cheap martyrdom; or with the air of one who is braving a great risk, which everybody knows does not really exist at all.

But, going back to that form of being ashamed of Christ and His gospel to which ordinary Christians are tempted; let it be said that plain as all this matter looks to us, with our weak sinful hearts, it must be very hard to get unfallen spirits to take it in, that such a feeling should exist among believing people, as that of which we have thought at this time. "Ashamed of the gospel of Christ!" Why, is not shame the feeling that should arise in man's heart, when he has done something very foolish, very mean, very sinful: and by what strange perversion comes it to be, that any rational being should be ashamed of doing what he knows is wise, and creditable, and right? I can imagine these sinless beings as saying, Surely there must be some strange mistake here: Surely the shame is ascribed to the wrong people: A man might have good reason to be ashamed, if, knowing Chris-

tianity was true, he was so foolish, or so wicked, as to deride the fellow-creature who avowed that he had sense enough to choose eternal holiness and happiness rather than endless sin and woe: But how could it be, that one who had done nothing more unwise than to believe the teaching of God, and to obey the commandments of God, should ever be ashamed that he should be known to have done so? And truly, brethren, when we look at the thing calmly, though we are well acquainted with the sad fact, we look in vain for the shadow of a reason for it. This is one of those cases in which, after the longest thought upon the subject, we come back, confirmed, to the same way of judging which struck us at the first glance. For when you just think what the gospel of Christ is: when you think what it is meant to do, for each soul here, and for our sinful and sorrowful race: when you look at it in the broad first view, of an Instrumentality to save immortal beings from sin and woe, and raise them to holiness and peace: is it not plain that every consideration of what is reasonable in sense, and what is right in morals;—every consideration of what a rational being would do, and an accountable being ought to do; comes in to confirm the choice and approve the wisdom of him who, after taking all things into account, deliberately resolves to side with the Redeemer, to apply to the gospel remedy, to glory in the cross of Christ!

Wherefore, let us each one say, with St Paul, "I

am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." And that we fail not consistently to say this by our life, in spite of whatsoever temptations may come, we here earnestly ask for the continual help of the Blessed and Holy Spirit.

IX.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF HUMAN NATURE.

"Is this Naomi?"—RUTH i. 19.

SHE is coming back, Naomi, from the country of the Moabites, after a ten years' sojourn there. After many a weary step, lightened much, as we may be sure, by the companionship of the true-hearted Ruth, she reaches once more the scenes that ten years since she had bidden farewell to; and sees before her Bethlehem stretched upon its hill as of old. She comes at the most cheerful season of the year: for it was "the beginning of the barley harvest;" and the earth was yielding the earliest fruits of its autumn bounty, while the long days and the smiling skies of summer had hardly passed away. But that cheerful season could wake no gladness in Naomi's heart: she could not choose but remember how changed was her lot since last she had looked on that well-known landscape: and we may readily conceive how each familiar feature of it, as it recalled the past, made the well-springs of sorrow gush anew. The like colours were in the sky, and the slopes

around were the very same, when she had gone forth from that little city a wife and a mother: but death had done his work upon that family; and now she was coming back a lonely widow with a widowed daughter-in-law. There was but little resemblance between Naomi as she had gone out full of hope and heart, and Naomi as she now came back desolate and drooping. She had stood by three deathbeds: she had bent over three graves: her husband and her two sons had been taken from her: they left Bethlehem when she left it, but they left it to return no more. It was indeed the same Naomi that came back: but she was the same just as the sere and yellow leaves of the last days of Autumn are the same which decked the boughs in the fresh green of spring. And as she entered the well-remembered street, the people gathered about her in wonder. They were perplexed to make out the identity: and as they looked upon the downcast wayfarers, and strove to trace in the elder the features they had known before, they said one to another, "Is this Naomi?"

It has long seemed to me, as if the subject which such words point to, were one of the most inexpressibly touching that can occur to the mind of man: let me now add, when we look at it in the light of the religious truth we believe, one of the most comprehensive and most awful. Touching and affecting indeed is the thought of the change which even in this world may pass on a human being, while yet he

remains consciously the same: but solemn beyond all words the thought of the change which may pass upon each of us, in the process of that endless existence which awaits us when we pass into the unseen world beyond the grave. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be:" the same in our conscious identity; but grown out of all knowing or remembering,—either for better or for worse. What we are now, gives us no ground at all to judge by, when we look on to the never-ending Future, and ask What shall we be? O brethren, to think that when Eternity has received us, and stamped us that which we shall be for ever, we shall have grown such that there shall not be found in the universe beings so purely holy, or so evil and miserable, that they shall be too good or too bad for our associates and companions! And to think, too, that if God's Word speaks truth, there is that material in every human soul, which just needs to be matured and developed, to make us such, that the outer darkness shall be the only place in God's universe, whose atmosphere and whose population shall be meet and congenial for us: while on the other side there is the solemn certainty, that to make us such that heaven may be our fit home, it needs not a development of something which is in us already, but the implanting in our hearts of a principle which never grew indigenously there. In a word, the soul of man is a thing which naturally, and without tending or care,

ripens towards perdition: the soul of man is a thing that, whatever it was once, is now such, that water does not find its level more certainly, than it, undirected by a Divine influence, channels its downward way to woe!

Such are the solemn and awful possibilities of human nature: such is our natural bias towards the worse possibility.

And I suppose that no reasonable person will be found, who ever thinks seriously on religious things at all,—who will for a moment doubt that all this is true. No one can deny the fact of Sin: nor that Sin, left alone, always tends to grow worse. Even in the most scanty creed, room must be found for the doctrine of Sin. Days have been in which creeds may perhaps have tended to be superfluously long and minute: Now, in many cases, they assuredly tend to be very scanty. But if men have any religious perception or moral thoughtfulness at all, they *must* discern that human nature is wrong, all wrong; and is tending, in each individual, to always grow worse. You would say, that if the man who sees all *that* believes in a God;—if he be not ready to sit down in blank despair;—he would go on to add to his belief that human nature is wrong, the further belief, that human nature needs to be set right;—set right by Redemption, set right by Regeneration:—washed in Christ's blood,—changed utterly by the Holy Spirit. I see not at what point the man who rejects these

blessed truths can stop, before reaching utter unbelief, and blank despair!

We thank God, through Jesus Christ, that we believe these great truths, and cleave to them: that we are not more assured by what we have seen all our lives and by all we have read in histories, of man's Ruin: than we are assured by His blessed Word and Spirit of Redemption and Regeneration. We know the Disease, but we know the Remedy: We are sure of the Need, but likewise of the rich Supply. We know that things are wrong; but we know what will set them right. If we did not know all this, then it were better we had never been born.

Now, do you, believing all you believe, ever give a little quiet time to thinking of the possibilities that lie before you: to thinking of the change that may pass upon you, while yet you will know you are the same person you are now? You know that here, for long times in our life, we keep (in outward appearance at least) much the same. Each Sunday sees the congregation looking just as it did the last. There is a change indeed, but it comes very gradually. Yet the hair grows gray: the lines on the face grow deeper. The greatness of the way is telling on all. The heart is far less hopeful: the step is less active. Does it sometimes come across you, with something of a start, that things cannot always go on in your lot as they are going now? Perhaps, even in earlier days, there has appeared to each of us as it were a sudden

rift in the clouds that conceal the future, and we have seen the way, far ahead,—the dusty way,—and an aged pilgrim pacing slowly along it; and in that aged figure we have each recognised our own young self. But I am thinking now of an outlook, more solemn by far. Do you sometimes try to look on, beyond this present life: Do you remember how, after a while, we are each going away; going away into a world we cannot see, and as for our life there, we know so infinitely little: yet we know this, that we are to live there very long, illimitably long: all the years here are nothing, even of the longest life, compared with the life there; and all the changes upon us here even in the longest life are nothing to the inconceivable changes which may pass upon us there: Think of going on and on and on There, year after year, century after century,—you and I growing older by far than Methuselah,—and each of us growing into God knows what, either in good or evil: Think of days, thousands of years after this, when all our life here shall look like a speck away in the distant past; and all the things we care for now be gone; we such changed creatures, living in a changed world, among things all changed! Now, when you think of that immeasurably long life, that awful life, with its awful possibilities, do you remember, solemnly remember, that it is only by being in Christ that you can feel safe as to what you may come to be: that away from Him, and unhelped by His great Atone-

ment, there is no limit as to what we may grow, in sin and wretchedness and ruin: that we never can feel the least safety, looking on to our future life, that future life which it is impossible to lay down or escape from, unless we have been regenerated by the Holy Ghost, and so the evil germ in our nature extirpated! Oh, who will face that awful Hereafter, that long eternity, with its possibilities of infinite change upon each of us here, without having laid hold of Christ's great salvation, freely offered to each of us in this accepted time: without having sought in earnestness to be renewed by that Divine Spirit, Who only can make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light!

No doubt at all there is an infinite sadness in it, when we think of nothing that reaches farther than the changes which are sure to come even in the mortal life. It is a sorrowful lesson we learn as we go on, that all worldly occupations and interests are wearing to their close. You cannot keep up the old thing, however much you may wish to do so. Personal identity, continued through the successive stages of life, is a commonplace thing to think of: but when it is brought home to your own case and feeling, it is a very touching and a very bewildering thing. There are the same trees and hills as when you were a boy: and when each of us comes to his last days in this world, how short a space it will seem since we were little children! It is strange to fancy

you see all those in your home going on as usual in the round of life, and you no longer among them: you far away. But yet more solemn and bewildering is the anticipation of what and what-like you are to be, after you go from this world. No change here can in any way equal that great change. And when the change comes for which Job purposed to wait, doubtless it will be only the first of many changes, of endless developments, through those endless years. Think, and try to realise it (for to do so is good for us), that you, people who are living here a quiet life with little incident, must some day go away, each of you all alone; where you will have all these unknown things to go through! Then hold by this: that once pardoned and sanctified, though you may change much in the unseen world, all change will be to the better and happier. But, unpardoned and unsanctified, oh who can say how you may change for the worse!

Do you doubt, any of you who are here, whether you are really such malleable material that, still remaining the same individual souls, you may yet be fashioned into something, whether for better or for worse, utterly beyond all present conceiving or imagining? Or, if you are ready to admit that God's grace is mighty enough to change even such weak, foolish, and sinful creatures as we are, into beings good enough and pure enough for Heaven,—the souls of believers being at their death made perfect in holi-

ness, however imperfect in it they may have been up to that moment,—do you still doubt whether the unregenerated and unpardoned soul really has in it the germ of such sinfulness and wretchedness as could ever make it deteriorate into evil so tremendous as should make it fit for such a doom and such a dwelling as seem to be threatened by certain words spoken by even the merciful Saviour Himself? Does it sometimes seem to us flatly impossible, that even the worst people we know, in our quiet corner of the world, and our life free from great extremes, should ever grow bad enough for hell? Ah brethren, if you are in the wrong path, and are to go on it through all eternity,—how very far wrong you may get! Everybody is growing worse, getting farther from God, who is not pardoned through Christ, who is not every day being sanctified in some measure by the Holy Spirit. Now if you are growing worse, getting farther from God, even under the manifold checks and restraints of this life, think how swiftly and terribly evil you might grow, where all these checks are taken away! Many people have occasion to know, that it is very much by vague misty prepossessions, never clearly put into shape, that faith is eaten away in these days in the minds of men, till faith is entirely wrecked. And I suppose there is no doubt that the whole solemn revealed truth of future woe (whatever its exact nature be) is being specially subjected to just this handling: this meeting the plain statements of God's Word by

the suggestion of almost intangible difficulties: this half-suggestion of facts which for the moment seem hard to reconcile with these plain statements; or which seem as though they even cast upon the doctrine a certain colour of ridicule. Surely it is strange, strange indeed,—that those who remember the changes they have seen pass upon people here; the miserable development as years went on of great sin and misery from little rudiments of evil apparent in childhood; should have difficulty in extending the analogy from time to eternity,—and believing that what happens here may happen there,—God having told us that it will! Surely we have seen enough round us in our own life, to constrain us solemnly and earnestly to seek that part in Christ, and that gift of the Holy Spirit, which will make us free of all changes and possibilities; making sure that all will be for good to us, and none for ill. You can never be quite sure of any human being, who is not truly converted to God. You can never know how grievously and miserably he may disappoint you: making you sorrowfully to put such a question as that in the text. A sad ending, in sin and shame, may come after a fair beginning. I do not forget that a haughty spirit and a self-confident spirit becomes no man: it is evil premonition of failure, and fall. Yet the humble believer, deeply feeling his dependence on God's grace, and daily praying for it, may yet cherish the good hope, that his Saviour will keep him

in the hour of temptation: will deliver him from every evil work, and bring him into His heavenly kingdom: forasmuch as, unless there be sore need for humbling, the portion of one who has truly gone to Christ, will be "increase of grace and perseverance therein to the end."

And now I may well take it for granted that nothing has been suggested to you to-day beyond what you all knew before. After all is said, this is merely putting in a somewhat different way the truth which you have been told at least every Sunday all your life, that before us human beings there are set good and evil, blessing and cursing, life and death; and that what we have got to do here in this world is to make our choice between these things. It is not a formal choice, made on some particular day, just once for all. It is a practical choice, the resultant and upshot of all your life, day after day, week after week, year after year. You are working, every day, towards another end than perhaps you think of. You are not working merely to earn food and raiment for yourselves and your children: there is something further on which you are doing while you do that. All our work here is either a sowing to the flesh or a sowing to the Spirit: It is either a laying up treasure here, or a laying up treasure above. If we commit and entrust our souls to Christ; and then try every day, by the help of God's Spirit asked many times

every day in prayer, to go through all our work in the constant remembrance that we have committed our souls to Christ;—then, though we may be doing just the common work that other people do, we are, through it all, sowing to the Spirit: laying up treasure in heaven: growing into that habit of soul, into that temper and character, that we may safely go away into the other world; and be sure we shall never be anything but holy and happy creatures there. Now, let us ask ourselves, as reasonable beings, what do we intend to do? What have we been doing? We have been working hard, each in his vocation, labourers, artizans, students, business men,—fathers and mothers, burdened with many household and family cares;—working hard all last week: we made some measure of progress in worldly work; or at least kept the machinery going, and kept the wolf from the door: Have we really been doing our work as Christian people ought; and so making it all Christian work; and growing, through the discipline of it, more like what Christ was? You see, it is not an arbitrary thing at all, fixed just at God's will, the state of each of us in the other world: it is just a development of the character into which we are growing now. You will not waken up from death, nor from resurrection, any other beings than what you are: but you will waken up developed beings;—full-grown as it were; all your characteristics and tendencies brought out more perfectly than was possible

here; and so infinitely worse or infinitely better than perhaps you had thought in this life. But it will still be you: still you, as the grown man is the very being that was once the little boy: still you, as the weary care-worn fretful heart that finds this world too hard and heavy for it, is the very heart that used to be so light, and to anticipate such a golden future here: still you, as the large, richly-cultured, nobly-disciplined mind that has gathered wisdom and goodness through years of sanctified experience, is the self-same mind that once was ignorant, prejudiced, narrow and crude. Great possibilities lie before us: we are creatures of whom much may be made. Rich attainments in holiness and blessedness lie before us, if we will but seek them in the right way: if we will but turn into the path in which Christ's kind Hand would lead us, and allow the Blessed Spirit to do that work on us which He waits to do. But I am not going to appeal to spiritual ambition: the sobering years have doubtless brought most of you rather to the lowlier desire for safety, for purity, for rest to you and yours. If you would have these things, come to the Saviour: and try (by God's blessing) to bring all for whom you care.

We shall hardly know ourselves again, entering the Golden City, if it please God for Christ's sake to bring us There. Think: "made perfect in holiness:" oh what a change that one thing

will make! All *that* in us which now disquiets, humbles, disheartens: all that leads us wrong—and we are always going wrong; fairly swept away! And how changed, There, too, some will be, who in this world had indeed the root of the matter in them, but co-existing with much alloy: good, high-principled men as ever lived; yet with much bigotry; much narrowness; much incapacity of sympathizing with such as differed from themselves, or even believing such to be honest and faithful:—what a sweeping away of unworthy prejudices there will be in the first hour in Heaven! Yes, and doubtless other changes will there be found, which come nearer to many hearts. The brother that went before us: the little child, growing in the Better World, that stayed here in remembrance always the little child that died: can this be you, so far happier and more glorious than we had ever dreamt!

X.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

"Jesus of Nazareth,—Who went about doing good."
—Acts x. 38.

THIS is biography: It is a complete sketch of a life.

This is plain statement of fact. If it be really true, you could not say less.

This is sublime panegyric. Speaking of any worker, you could not say more.

Come and let us think upon these words, and what they suggest to us. They set before us the life's occupation of our Blessed Lord: yet what was so only incidentally. This was not the express work He came to this world to do. He came to this world to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself: to give His life a ransom for many. Yet, that He might die, it was needful that He should live. And here you have the occupation of His life characterised. Every one knows that it is characterised truly. The text does our Lord bare justice. "Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good."

So it is suggested, first, that His life on earth was one of active exertion. He was not idle, but constantly employed: always up and "doing." Maker, Monarch, Saviour of this world; Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace; He spent His days not in idle state, but in real, hard, and wearying work. He had not been accustomed to idleness before He came here in mortal form: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,"—so He said Himself. For Christ was the Creator whose mind had planned and whose hand had fashioned this world, with all its continents and seas and races: and Christ was the Provider Whose ceaseless care sustained and tended the endless crowds of beings and things which He had called into existence. And though now His Godhead was to be hidden within a mantle of flesh, and He was to add to it a human soul with its want and weakness, there was to be no change in the old activity: The hand that had wrought so busily in time past, was to be engaged as busily still. Now what a dignity does this thought throw around all right and earnest labour! Let such as idle their time away, remember that they stand alone, a monstrous anomaly in a hard-working universe. God is ever working: so are higher intelligencies that are His messengers: so was Christ when He was here. The law of work is impressed even on things which have no life: All things come on some errand on which they are sent by God: Except man,

who sometimes uses his reason to make himself useless, there is not a thing God has made which is for no use. The sunbeam, flowing around the blossom, is "silently maturing fruits which are yet unseen;" and every wind that blows is redressing some deviation from law. Most true it is that "the blessing is in the curse:" and that labour, the symbol of man's punishment, is the secret of his happiness. The very humblest, who diligently does the work set him, may bear it in mind that work is not only the atmosphere in which all moral good grows, all healthfulness and cheerfulness,—but that it is a dignified thing, no less than a right and a happy thing. I think the day is almost gone, in which any one but a contemptible fool would fancy that to be exempt from the need to toil, entitles any mortal to look down upon such as live by sweat of brow or wear of brain. But it is always good to remember that our Blessed Redeemer was a hard-working man: and hard work is noble now!

But Christ was not merely doing: He was doing good. This work-day world can show hosts of industrious men and women; hosts of people who are working to the very extremity of their powers, both of body and mind. Ceaseless work and worry are perforce the lot of most; and by choice the lot of the worthy among those who might escape them. So Christ's life, if we thought of it only as a life of labour, might seem to have imitators enough among

men. Now I am not going to run down human nature: a vast deal of the very hardest of our work is not selfish: all our best work goes out upon others beyond the worker himself. Many of us, who work very hard, might take our work easily enough if it were only ourselves we thought of. All I ask you to remark,—and I mean no more than I say,—is that Christ's work was to benefit others,—not to aggrandise Himself. It was no selfish motive that prompted what He did. And so uniform was His conduct, that four words serve to characterise the tenor of a life-time: and the sum of all Christ's doing upon earth can be expressed by saying, that He "went about doing good."

There is something that comes wonderfully straight to the heart, about pure disinterested benevolence. If there be any suspicion of the fussiness of a meddling busybody, *that* spoils all. But unselfish, self-forgetting devotion to the good of others, must touch any but the worst of the race: has touched even them. There are few but have felt this, reading the story of one who, by his own free choice, in days before philanthropy had grown fashionable, would spend his time in the gloom of prisons and the infection of lazarettos, seeking out woes to alleviate and wrongs to redress: and it seemed hardly a flight of poetic fancy, that the path of Howard was watched by blessed saints and angels, through all the repulsive ways in which his burning sense of duty led him;

till at length, martyr of a deed of mercy, he found his nameless grave where no friend should ever see it;—if the rude dwellers in that distant tract could not feel that every man was the friend of him who was the common friend of his race! And so deeply-set in us are the well-springs of human feeling, that a hundred times has genius chosen as the theme to melt many hearts, the story and character of men who seemed to live most for the sake of others: and a hundred times, specially in the literature of late years, we have been told of the omnipotence of kindness, and its softening influence on the most abandoned of humankind. But, strange as it may seem, the passage from sentimentalism to reality is a rude shock to some. To go and do the good they can to the suffering they know, is just the last lesson some learn from reading which awakes a certain kindly glow. And there are those whose tears readily start at the fictitious tale of a benevolence which perhaps had its larger part in weakness, yet who will feel only weariness and distaste when we point them to Him, whose unwearied and sublime benevolence, amid personal suffering which would have made many a one selfish, would mark Him,—apart altogether from any thought of His Divine nature and His atoning work,—as incomparably the kindest Friend of man.

There is one thing which immediately suggests itself, when we think of our Saviour's "doing good," as distinguished from that of human philanthropists.

In Him, the world saw, for the first and last time, will and power working harmoniously together: One who had the power to do all the good He wished, and the will to do all the good He was able. There, in that human form, dwelt at once the love and the power of God Almighty! What *could* His employment be, but doing good? We hardly need the inspired page to tell us, that wherever He found pain or woe,—by the wayside, at the city-gate, in the crowded street, in the house of death,—it needed little entreaty to prevail on Him to bid them cease. He healed diseases: gave back lost senses: cast out evil spirits: raised the dead. Without respect of persons: of course without hope or possibility of reward: He did good alike to body and soul. Not the good merely which man could do to his fellow-man if he had the mind and heart; but good impossible to man; that higher and farther good which only divine power could do.

When our Saviour healed disease, He attacked it directly, and authoritatively: it need not be said, always successfully. The earthly physician ransacks the stores of nature in search of means and appliances which may lighten the sufferings which flesh is heir to: but after he has done his utmost, there is many a malady to which *his* skill affords little relief;—many a disease whose progress to the grave there is no human arresting. The hectic cheek, the bright eye, the singular dwelling on the future, may tell us that one dear is touched by that which in a few weeks or months

must bring down to the grave: but for us to think to arrest decay, is as vain as to bid the sun stand still. And there are many of our race now to whom some bodily disability or infirmity is appointed; and who must just bear it: go on through life at sad disadvantage: bearing up as God helps them to do: sometimes indeed doing the work of life nobly with all. But though the blind man may write *Paradise Lost*, he will never see. Though the stone-deaf man * may compose the sublimest music for the ears of others, he will never hear. Though one, laid year after year on an anguished bed, may attain a sublime resignation, and a sweetness of temper half-angelic, there is no possibility of relief from agony till the place is reached where there shall be no more pain. But think of One, able to cure all manner of sickness and disease, though naturally incurable: giving sight to the hopelessly blind, hearing to the deaf; bidding the fever stop in running the inevitable course; standing beside the dead, and bringing them back again! A single word lifted up the dying: but what virtue in it! In that kindly-spoken word, there was concentrated the reviving influence of many cordial balms, and refreshing sleeps, and bracing breezes. There were months of the climate of Italy compressed within the few moments our Lord spent in rebuking the disease: a whole pharmacopeia of human remedies in one word of the great Creator! But how shall we

* Beethoven.

even pretend to fancy the rationale of that transcendent doing, that refitted and quickened the worn-out machinery of material life, and called back from the other world the departed soul? What was there in *Talitha-cumi* to do that! What, in *Lazarus, come forth!* How shall we speak in the presence of such things, unless to acknowledge the presence of God Almighty: to declare that infinite power and infinite mercy together walked this world, when Jesus of Nazareth "went about doing good!"

Further: let us think that our Blessed Lord when here was not merely busied in doing good: He "*went about* doing good." He did not wait till sorrow and suffering found their way to Him;—He went to seek them. He did not confine Himself to one region, but went from place to place; and whatever place He came to, His employment was the same: He was still doing good. Even the most energetic of human philanthropists seem to feel as though their philanthropy gets dissipated among the multitude when they spread it over too large a surface: and many are found to concentre their efforts to do good to some favoured locality;—to their own village, their own parish, their own estate. And this inevitably. We can do but a little: and it is better to do a little well, than a great deal inefficiently. But it did not need early association, nor some sense of personal connexion, to warm the Redeemer's heart with the desire to bless the human beings He

saw. And wherever He went, there would always be sin and sorrow. Then remember, the way in which Christ did good to all, was by doing good to each. There have been many men who professed to cherish a warm concern for the wellbeing of large classes and communities, while yet they never showed the least real interest in the wellbeing of the separate individuals of whom these classes and communities are made up. This is the quackery of benevolence; not to say the hypocrisy. There have been those who made great profession of patriotism,—that is, of regard for the welfare of their country at large: and likewise those who found even such limits too narrow for their cosmopolitan spirit, and who professed to regard the world as their native land, and the human race as the family for whose good they desired to labour. But in the case of some, this profession of regard for all, was just an excuse for feeling no practical regard for any: and there have been a great many in the ranks of this world's patriots and philanthropists, in whom the feeling of interest was spread over such a space, that it fell very thinly upon each separate point in it; and with whom aggregates were so much the objects of concern, that it would be hard for them to tell us of one single case in which their well-expressed feeling ripened into active result, or of one single individual whom it made happier or better. But how different with the wide-spread beneficence of the Saviour! Loving all, as no other ever did;—"loving

the world;"—He had the patient ear and the kind heart for each individual sufferer that came to Him, feeling as though his own story and own case were all the world to himself. Patient hearing: kind sympathy: effectual help; every poor creature found these, who ever went in want and woe to Christ.

There is more to be remembered as to our Saviour's beneficence: Think of the circumstances in which all this good was done. For we may imagine how doing good might be its own reward; and how a life of active benevolence, once begun, might be the easiest, the happiest, the most natural. There have been men, the history of one among them has found an imperishable record,—who, in some quiet secluded spot, have pleased themselves with the task of making all who dwelt near them happy. They spent their wealth, not in raising sumptuous buildings, nor in collecting works of art; but to the nobler end of relieving age and want, and of tending sickness till the weary heart gained strength for the rough work of life again. They healed differences between man and man, and earned the blessing of the peacemakers. They had a cheerful smile and a hopeful word for youth that had the world before it: an interested look and a kind advice for those involved in the little fever of life: and for age, looking back on a pilgrimage nearly past, an old remembrance and a pensive tear. The Christian church rose, at their cost, on the slope of some breezy hill; and invited

weary men to rest, to worship, to be thoughtful and thankful: and the quiet churchyard spreading round it was the place, where, in a humble grave, open to sunshine and rain, they laid down the mantle of mortality, when their spirit went to that country where the cup of cold water kindly given, shall not fail of abundant reward.

All this they did; and the heart warms at their history. Not without some grateful glow, can any one worth counting recall the work and name of the Man of Ross. You remember how the bitter satirist melted into unwonted tenderness in telling of all he did; and apologised nobly for his nameless grave. But though such as that simple and kindly philanthropist have their sure reward in a better world, they did not miss their reward even here. As they went down into the vale of years, did not kind looks, and warm blessings, and earnest prayers, make them happier by far than kings and conquerors? We read how the stranger was wont to wonder, when he saw the white-haired old man, with a bent frame but a bright eye,—a look that went beyond this world, and was only made more cheerful by what it saw,—received by old and young wherever he went with the reverence and love due to one but a very little lower than the angels. When at length he died, all looked as if they had lost a father: and though no stone might mark his resting-place and record his actions, he had a nobler monument than was ever

reared of marble or of granite, in the touched heart and beaming eye of those he left behind him, at the mention of his name.

But there were no such pleasant surroundings of love and gratitude, when Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good! His miracles of mercy never gained for Him any wide-spread or enduring gratitude or affection. He had gleams of that fickle popularity,—and He knew exactly what it was worth,—which one day cried *Hosanna to the Son of David*, and a day or two later, *Away with Him, Crucify Him!* But He never got a lasting hold upon even the mass of the people He did so much for: and as for their rulers, they regarded Him with a persistent bitterness of hatred, which we should call devilish if we did not know it to be so thoroughly human. "You do not know the race," said the great Prussian king to one who suggested to him something hopeful about poor humanity*: But Christ did know the race: "He knew what was in man," and accordingly would not trust man: but He went on doing good all the same. There was in His case everything to check the warmth of benevolence: to sour the sweetest spirit into gall. We can make out that His worldly kindred were uncongenial: "Neither did they believe in Him." And His own experience prompted the saying which has grown proverbial, that a prophet has no honour in his own country and among his own kin. Those He

* The words actually used by Frederick were stronger.

benefited were often vilely ungrateful: The ten lepers were cleansed, but only one thought of giving thanks. He chose the twelve special friends; and one long sought opportunity to betray Him, and found it at the last. Great numbers seem to have been hopelessly stupid, unimpressible, indifferent, chilly-hearted: and to one glowing with earnest affection, bent above all things to urge home the great truths with which his own soul is laden, such an attitude of spirit is just the most irritating and vexatious and disappointing of all. Even Christ felt it. "Ye will not come unto Me:" "How often would I have gathered thy children, and ye would not!" Now many a human worker, eager to do good; feeling all this keenly and constantly; is tongue-tied by the fear lest he be mistaking selfish mortification for true zeal for God and truth. How dare the earnest minister speak sharply as to the neglect of public ordinances; when perhaps, God knows, perhaps it is only mortified self-conceit at his own slighted services that truly prompts what he may think the faithful rebuke? But with Christ there could be no such mistake. The keenness of His displeasure at spiritual privileges trampled underfoot, was not in any degree abated by any such intruding fear. Christ *ought* to have been far more angry than any mortal man can (without presumption) dare to be. And as for the malignant suspicions, the slanders, the persecutions, of the rulers of the Jews, —even the meek Saviour kept no terms with these.

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers:" sharp words, but perfectly true: truth without taint of exaggeration. There have been warm and good hearts, that set out with the burning desire to mend and bless mankind, which such influences as these have alienated into a bitter and fierce misanthropy, that cast off all commerce with a race so hopeless, and laughed a sore laugh over the romantic fancies of departed days of delusion. But when all these blighting and chilling influences were concentrated upon the love to man that glowed in Christ, He went on loving man as before, and doing good to man as before; unchecked and unchilled by all. Some, and some not bad to start with, might have wished in bitterness for another deluge. But spite of ingratitude and ill-deserving; in want and weariness; seeing the sin so clearly, yet loving the sinner more; Jesus of Nazareth "went about doing good!"

So we have thought for a little while upon this short text; which, in four words in our language, and no more than two in the original tongue, tells us how Christ employed Himself when here. "Went about doing good!" There was but one of His miracles which even in appearance was an exception to the unvaried tenor of His beneficence: and only in appearance was *that* an exception: for many immortal souls have been lastingly profited by the blighting of that one unconscious tree. There is

nothing unkind in cutting down a tree to build a ship with it: nothing unkind, either, in withering up a barren fig-tree as a solemn lesson to the fruitless professors of all after time. But now, looking back on our Saviour's active working, what is the lesson for each one here? It is very plain, and near. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Him. Let us seek in this to follow Him, who is our great Exemplar. Let us seek, by God's grace, to see in His life not merely the Example to which, day by day, we should strive to conform our lives, but something that has in it a real constraining power to assimilate us to itself. It does us good, it lifts us above ourselves, it draws us to nobler aims, to look at the life of even an earnest good man, devoted to what is kind and true: Surely we cannot contemplate the life of our Redeemer without being in some measure stimulated and elevated! We cannot go back, after that, to say and do little ill-set things: we shall not fail to have the kind word and the helpful hand for every one we can help: we shall not think of abounding sin and sorrow near us, without considering whether there be not some good that we can do! So shall we be "conformed to the image of God's dear Son:" So shall we "walk as He walked," Who "left an example to us, that we might follow His steps:" So shall we "grow up with the increase of God," "till we come to" some humble "measure of the stature of Christ!"

XI.

THE TWILIGHT MEDITATION.

"And Isaac went out to meditate in the field, at the eventide."
—GEN. xxiv. 63.

THIRTY-EIGHT centuries up the course of time; and we are in the midst of the patriarchal age: that age which seems so remote from ours, and so utterly different from ours. But, whatever changes have passed upon the human race in the long time we have named, we get, in this text, a glimpse of the domestic life of those departed days, which tells us how like human beings are, find them where we may. When do we meditate now, but in the quiet summer evening: and where, but in the field alone? So, on a day thirty-eight hundred years since, the sun arose, shone upon the world, and went down, just as he did yesterday, just as he will do today: and with the gentle coming on of that long-past twilight, the same spirit of leisurely thinking came down upon the soul of man. We can answer at least for this, that it came upon one man: for on that

day, in its declining light, it is written that "Isaac went out to meditate in the field, at the eventide."

We seem to feel naturally that day is the time for work. There is something about its broad, searching light, that suggests activity and exertion. The sun rises, says the Psalmist; and "man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour, until the evening." And the primeval curse involved a blessing, when it said to man "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread:" so true is it that labour, the symbol of man's punishment, is the secret of man's happiness. There are very few, and it is well there should be few, who are exempt from that early appointment of the Creator. If it be not directly by the sweat of the brow that men live, then it is by the wear of the brain: and even those whose circumstances do not make toil needful for their support, are yet driven, by the necessity of their nature, to exertion; and often work as hard to kill time, as other men do to improve it. But though work be thus the appointed lot of man, it is not meant that his time should be spent in unvarying work. "Man goeth forth to his work and his labour,—until the evening." But when the shadows lengthen, and the light grows less and less, till the long gray fields stretch into gloom, and the trees stand still and spectral: when all sounds are hushed that speak of bustle and toil, and the murmur of the river, unheard in the light and stir of day, steals on the ear, mellowed to pensive music: when the breeze

has died away, and the tree-tops are motionless against the sky; then is the time for the task to cease, and for quiet thought to begin. And now that these long summer evenings draw us forth, amid scenes and memories specially congenial with the twilight, let us see whether we may not turn the evening walk and the evening musings to some profitable account; in the direction of growing seriousness of soul, and deepening earnestness of heart.

For we must not think that the meditations of evening have of necessity any heavenward tendency. Isaac, who feared God and loved Him, went forth to meditate at the eventide: but many a man who does neither can saunter forth in the twilight, and give the reins to fancy too. What we are in our hours of work, we shall be also in our hours of meditation: and if all our plans, hopes, and wishes, centre on the things of time and sense, depend on it our thoughts, when disengaged, will run in the same channel: and we shall be just as worldly when we meditate with Isaac, as when like Martha we are cumbered with toil. And there is hardly a more searching test whether we have indeed laid up our treasure above, or whether we are really living and working as if this world were all, than we have in observing into what train of thought and feeling our minds naturally fall, when left to themselves in our solitary evening walk. It is a bad sign of us if we are perfectly worldly then. It shows to what we gravitate. It

shows what kind of things they are that we really care most for. But it is a happy and cheering sign, if it be in some measure with us as it was with him who said, "While I was musing, the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue." The Psalmist's meditation, you see, warmed his heart; and the words spoken were words of prayer. "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am."

Now, there are some things to be remembered, when we begin to talk about meditation. And the first of these is, that if by meditation you mean orderly and consecutive thought, moving towards a conclusion, then the power of meditating is possessed by very few. Curiously, the thing which is needed to help most men to get their thoughts into shape and arrangement, is that they be required to express their thoughts, whether in speech or writing. They do not really know what is in their mind, till they are called to bring it out and exhibit it. And to some people, not even speech can clear and arrange thought: it is necessary that they should have to write down what they are thinking. You have all heard of that delightful author who said that he never could reason unless with the pen in his hand. When people in general say they are meditating, the fact is they are thinking of nothing. There is no real purpose or intention in their thinking: the mind is just drifting away. Yet we can all think of nothing, and yet the mind be anything but a blank.

And the daily occupations of some are of such a nature, that they have long times at their disposal during which their minds are given up to that desultory dissipation. Now, any suggestions towards making our seasons of meditation profitable, must go on the understanding that meditation, in the case of average folk, is and always must be this desultory, aimless thing. The mind is brooding on a subject: but making no advance either in seeing through it, or putting it in a better and truer light, or training the heart to regard it fitly.

Then, further, I wish to speak at present of the discipline of our restful seasons of thought: not of thought implying mental and spiritual effort. Thinking, you know, is sometimes a great and exhausting effort. Weighing, under the heavy sense of responsibility, the reasons on either side of some difficult question, whether of conduct or belief: Forcing one's self to get free of cherished prejudices, and inveterate bents: To such grave departments of that solemn ruling of the spirit which forms so great a part of our Christian life, I have already turned your thoughts. We are to think now of the restful periods of thought which implies no exertion: and how, if possible, to make these profitable without their ceasing to be restful. And even here, we must remember how large a share of practical religion consists in keeping the heart with all diligence: in ordering the thoughts aright: in making God's testimonies our meditation.

And the Psalmist puts the two things in contrast and opposition; "I hate vain thoughts, but Thy law do I love."

Further still, remembering that I am preaching to a large congregation of professed Christians, and not to a picked body of far advanced and firmly established believers, I am not going to dishearten you by proposing, as something essential to all converted persons in their hours of disengaged thought, a height of devout thought and feeling attainable by comparatively few; and these highly favoured both by grace and by nature. It would be very good for us, indeed, and a happy sign of our state, if when we go forth alone in these quiet summer evenings, our minds naturally and spontaneously turned into such a track as this: To think of God our Heavenly Father: of all His glorious attributes: of all His care and kindness to our Race and ourselves: To think of Christ our Blessed Saviour: of His love: His works: His sufferings: His death: His great salvation: To think of ourselves: of our guilt, our ruin; of our one door of hope: of our repentance towards God, our faith in Jesus, our charity towards men: To think of our friends: of their state with God; of their fitness to die; of the reality of their religious profession; of our hope to meet them beyond the stream of death, and to spend eternity with them, after all these cares and strifes are past, in the blessed presence of our Redeemer. Well, it is indeed a thing greatly to be

desired that our meditations should be such like: Then indeed we should be heavenly-minded. That is a fair ideal: but let us be thankful that we may be true Christians though our attainments be far humbler than that: though our minds, in disengaged minutes, run mainly on the little cares and worries of our own daily life, and our own little plans and hopes. Few here present could probably say with truth, that any specially elevated and spiritual train of reflection made the staple of their mind's employment during their last solitary evening walk: or that, unless in exceptionably happy moods, their meditations through the evenings of this summer have been such as these.

And yet it seems to me as if, without proposing a standard requiring unusual mental training as well as unusual spiritual elevation; and without making it as hard work to meditate in the eventide, as to reason in the daylight: it is possible to suggest two or three rules, easy to understand and to apply, which would make our twilight musings more profitable than we have oftentimes found them to be.

One such rule is, during these vacant seasons, to refuse to let our minds rest on those little irritating and vexatious subjects of which so many are sure to arise in the complicated relations and intercourses of modern social life. There are human beings who, whenever they have a little while by themselves for solitary thought, will whip themselves up into a fever

of indignation, suspicion, and discontent. They brood over the small slights and offences they have met: They think over the demeanour and talk of some neighbour till they have found ever so much evil and unkindness in them: They harp away on the disappointments and inconveniences of their own lot in life, till their heart is sore with discontent and ingratitude. Now, I should be the last to counsel, as a Christian duty, that selfish slothful Epicureanism which turns away from a painful subject because it cannot bear the pain of it; while any good is to be got by dwelling upon it. No: look evil straight in the face; look full at this sinful world's sin and sorrow; though the sight and thought be heavy as lead on the heart; while *that* is needful to your manfully in God's Name battling with it: battling with the little corner of that sad array which stands opposite to yourself: It is not from *this* that I counsel you to look away in your twilight meditation: though I know it will end the meditation for that evening: It will quicken the pulse and step, it will tax the brain, it will stimulate the hand to work with its might, it will turn you speedily to Almighty God in urgent prayer. And, coming to lowlier and more individual matters, I am sure that worry must be a means of grace, or God would not let so much of it be in the lot and life of His own children: Why, it is the chief forming influence that shapes the character of most Christian people now: and the Blessed Spirit

is able and willing to turn all earthly care into heavenly discipline. But though you may worry yourself inexpressibly by ill-directed thought in your evening walk, you will not get the salutary discipline in that way. Because worry, like every other painful thing up to martyrdom, is not for us to seek but for God to send: It is presumption to try for more of it than He makes inevitable: and there will always be quite enough without our bringing it on ourselves. And also, because it is only when it is met in the right spirit that this painful and humbling thing will do us any good: and this is not meeting it in the right spirit. It is a perilous medicine, remember: with wonderful power to subdue and sweeten our nature: but, if unsanctified by the Holy Ghost, far likelier to sour into wrath and bitterness than to sweeten or subdue. Wherefore I counsel you, in your times of solitary thinking, avoid that kind of thought and remembrance of which I have suggested some specimens, and of which each of you will readily think of many more. To let your mind get into that track is not merely painful in itself; but it is forming a bad habit, and subjecting your character to a malign influence. Then, though it is certain that painful and wounding thoughts have a remarkable power to force the mind to attend to them even when it would rather not, yet all this is far more under our own control than we are ready to believe. And we all ought far more regularly to train ourselves, when we feel that

we are getting upon a wrong tack of thinking and feeling and remembering;—when we feel that we are going away out of the light of God's face into a doleful region of irritation, suspicion, ill-set reflection, wrath and strife, to pray for the Holy Spirit to help us in that hour of temptation. I believe that, as a general rule, we should be immediately cheered up, calmed, and set right, if we did that: the evil mood would go away, and the dark hour. We should be lifted up, instantaneously, into a higher and purer air, where these wretched little influences cannot reach us: as a great mountain towers above fogs and vapours to where there is only bright sunshine and blue sky. I fear there are a few people who go through life, trying to say little unkind things that may stick like darts into their acquaintances, and pain them in times when their minds are disengaged. Now, just you pray for the Holy Spirit to order your heart and mind: and such people will be as impotent to hurt you as a wretched mosquito is to sting you through a plate of steel. You will take their measure, and know them for the despicable vermin that they are.

So much of negative counsel as to the guidance of your thoughts in your evening meditation. Let us think of something more positive.

Shall we think of the Christian going forth like Isaac in the eventide of summer, and letting his disengaged thoughts go out on the beauty of the scene

around? He, no less than the mere man of taste and sentiment, can feel and enjoy the charm that dwells in this softened light and gentle air: He, too, can dwell upon the green fields, rich with that summer luxuriance which is always so much richer than our remembrance of it: upon the trees so motionless, the shaded sapphire of the sky beyond, and the latest colours of the sunset as it sinks away: upon the broad sea, sometimes indeed a sea of glass mingled with fire: and the mountains, softened into enchantment by the blue distance. And say, brethren, does the scene grow less beautiful to the devout man's eye, because he looks through it up to its Creator: because that which to the view of worldly culture is no more than a fair material earth, is to him animated and hallowed by a divine soul that looks through every leaf in it: because on everything he sees, closing daisy and growing wheat as truly as sea and mountain, there are left the traces of the handiwork of the Blessed Redeemer, by Whom and for Whom all things were made? Surely the scene gains a tenfold interest, as it turns from a mere expanse of blank beauty, into a page of deep meaning and endless instruction! Thus regarded, external nature is by far more lovely: for we all know that *expression* is a chief part of all beauty; and it is only to the devout eye that nature's face wears any expression at all. To the undevout eye it looks beautiful; but then it means nothing. It is when we train ourselves to that habit of mind in

which we are always ready to recognise our Redeemer's hand in all He made, that we can see the full beauty of outward nature, and enjoy it as no other can. Yes, the Christian, if he has enlightenment to see and use his privileges, is the man who truly relishes this beautiful summer world. Its scenery is for his eye, and its music for his ear. It has, not in sentimentalism but in sober truth, much to teach and suggest, for which he will be the wiser, purer, and better-hearted. There is much about it to soothe and cheer: much to suggest the fairer regions of the new heaven and new earth where dwell holiness and happiness. Let us try, then, in our evening walks this summer, in this spirit to look upon outward nature. So shall the twilight meditation, without the least risk of turning to task-work, gain a heavenward tendency: and even in the immediate enjoyment of scenery, we shall lose nothing and gain much.

Or shall we think of the humble believer, in his meditation in the eventide of the day, as letting his mind for a little expatiate over an expanse of time, instead of space? He passes, let us think, from the contemplation of the twilight landscape with its solemn shades, to the contemplation of that varied way along which God has led him from the earliest days he can remember, down to the passing hour: and as with a softened and whispering memory, there come before him the thoughts of old friends and by-gone times: of the home of childhood, of the father

and mother and the little companions, scattered and dead: of schoolboy days, and the anxious cares of after-life, often so heavy; of losses and gains, disappointment and success; say, my friends, will this lingering retrospect turn to a toil, if, as he holds it in view, the Christian seeks to trace it in the times when the kind hand of his God rescued him from peril, and directed in perplexity, and sustained in deep sorrow and slow-wearing care? Surely the remembrance of departed days will not lose a charm but gain one, if we train ourselves to read there our own individual reasons for faith and love towards our God and Saviour; Who guided us through the perplexing paths of life: Who called us (we humbly trust) out from worldly folly, and taught us simply to trust our souls to Him Who died for them, and gave the Blessed Spirit to sanctify and comfort us in all our way: Whose never-failing kindness in the past assures us against the future; as we call to mind the great Apostle's resistless logic, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

They were not the "vain thoughts" which the prophet condemned, that succession of old remembrances, if in their still procession they brought with them and left behind them some precious atoms of faith and love towards the kind God Who led us, and the kind Saviour Who redeemed us, and the Blessed Spirit Who works in us day by day. Not vainly in

the evening walk, shall we live over again that sad time in our story, seldom remembered in the bustle of work-day life, when death made the first break in the circle of our home, and we first saw the cold immovable stillness which makes awful the face that used to be only very dear; if there come with it the remembrance of consolation given by Him Who is the Almighty Comforter; of the blessed trust of meeting in a better world; and of the dust given to kindred dust in the sure and certain hope of a joyful Resurrection. Not vainly, summoned up to "the sessions of silent thought," shall there come from out the past the vision of infant days, when at a mother's knee we said our earliest prayers, and learned the first we knew of Christ and heaven with Him, if from that time, its memories and associations, there comes an influence that makes even the faith we cherish and the Saviour we trust more hallowed and dear. Not vainly, in the eventide of the day, shall we run over the career that has made us whatever we are, in worldly wealth and estimation; if from our earthly lot, its gains and losses, we turn to our soul's health and prosperity; and ask ourselves whether, amid all outward changes, we have still been steadily laying up our true treasure in heaven; and striving that from all the dealings of God's providence we might draw that education for eternity which the Holy Spirit designed they should impart. And not vainly, either, shall our thoughts have turned from the years

that are gone, to the unknown tract before us, if as we remembered how pulse by pulse the principle of mortal life is wearing out, and minute by minute the sands of time are running, and how all that we value on earth must leave us or be left by us,—if we came back to the door of our home with the prayer in our heart, that when a longer night shall take the light from these eyes, and compose this body to a deeper sleep, the Blessed Saviour would sustain us in His everlasting arms, and abide with us when the evening has come, and the day here is entirely spent.

And so that unsystematic meditation, which must of necessity fill some part of our life, may, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, serve blessed and gracious ends. The guidance of our heart and thoughts: the forming devout habits of mind: the cultivation of grateful and heavenly affections: the training ourselves systematically to see God's hand and to remember Him: the habitual reference in all things to Christ, bringing (as it were) to Him all that interests and concerns us: these things make a great part of practical religion. And our religious character will, in a large degree, depend upon the lines of thinking and feeling into which our minds learn to fall habitually in our vacant hours or minutes. And these little vacant seasons are a crucial test of us. It is not outward acts that are the testing things now: "out of the heart proceed the things which defile the

man:" and to make a holy life, you know God's Spirit begins by renewing the heart; from which all outward acts proceed, and from whence they take their character as good or evil in the sight of God. And not only is it of vital concern that the heart be kept aright in these seasons of meditation: Let us be thankful that, without ceasing to be restful and pleasant, without becoming a task, and assuredly without becoming gloomy or mournful; they may be made as profitable a discipline as there is in the range of the ordinary means of grace. For meditation, hallowed by the often-recurring remembrance of our Saviour and God, will pass, naturally and oftentimes, into holy communion with Him. Not the formality of a long supplication: but the brief word, the upward look, the silent motion of the soul. And, in its best form, yet not by any means an unattainable form, the twilight meditation, with all its easy desultoriness, might be a time of self-examination: of devout thought of God and communion with God: one prolonged yet unfatiguing act of faith and love and prayer.

July 11, 1869.

XII.

A GOOD MAN.

"For he was a good man."—ACTS xi. 24.

IT is easy to think of various words in our language, which, as time has gone on, have come to bear a very different meaning from that which they once did: sometimes a much larger meaning. As men grow older, and as the world grows older, people find that they have been using words which meant a great deal more than they fancied they did.

As for instance: There was a long time that when people talked of the Sun, the thing they meant by that word was a burning disc, about a yard in diameter, set in the sky not very far above this world; which, in the morning rose in the east, and in the evening went out of sight in the west. They have learned now that the word means something quite different:—something a great deal bigger, grander, farther off, and more magnificent, than what they had thought.

Then there once was a time that when people talked of the world, they meant a few little countries

lying around the Mediterranean Sea. They did not know what vast meaning was in the word: what immeasurable tracts of land and ocean were implied by it. As for the Universe, human beings, not very many hundred years since, fancied it meant just this world; and certain sparks of fire, called the stars, fixed in a crystal sphere a few miles above the surface of the earth. They did not know how great a meaning lay unsuspected in the word they uttered:—what unfathomable depths of space; what long millions of miles; what gigantic worlds amid which even our great earth is no more than a sand-grain.

And I suppose we can all think of words which the experience of our own life has taught us to use in quite a different meaning from what we once did. When we were children, a year meant a very long, —an almost endless number of days and weeks: it has grown a shorter thing now. A little thought, too, could call up some words, expressing moral facts, which once looked like very small things, conveying a very simple idea; but which, now we have read into them, we find to contain whole labyrinths of thought, great mazes of meaning, dimly discerned, and little understood. And it is just because some people have a greater power than others, of calling up vividly before them all these windings and expanses of thought which are implied in human words; that there is such a difference between the impressions made on different people by the same discourse, or

the same piece of printed language. One man reads a sublime passage from some great writer: and it takes possession of him, overwhelms him, kindles many trains of thinking in his own mind: for he sees, with life-like reality, something like what the great genius designed to express. Another man reads the same passage; and he yawns and wearies: he may understand the words indeed to a certain extent: but he cannot take in their reach and depth of sense. And though this is an example of what I mean, still it is chiefly in the case of words bearing a spiritual significance that it is so:—that people (that is) can make out dimly a great idea looming (as it were) through a word, like a mountain through mist; while yet they do not sharply comprehend the complete sense which the word conveys. Think of the Name of Almighty God! Think of the word Eternity. Think of the words Salvation and Perdition. We lose ourselves amid the thoughts these names suggest. They perplex: they overwhelm.

Now it seems to me that in my text, which is a short text, there is an expression, which is a common expression, of which we may say with truth that when we read it in the light of some things told us in the New Testament, we shall understand it as meaning something quite different, in some important respects, from that which it used at one time to be understood to mean. And perhaps, too, we may say with truth, that this expression is many times used very thought-

lessly; and with little perception of its true depth and extent of sense. "A good man:" the phrase comes readily to the lips: it is very familiar, very often used. And it is not too much to say, that we should not use it so often; and we should not apply it so liberally; if we always remembered what, in the mouth of Christian people, it means. "A good man:" Nobody thinks it anything like extravagantly complimentary language, to call another *that.* When we call any one "a good creature," we intend very faint praise. Many will even go the length of a very good man, or (as it is sometimes given) an excellent good man, without taking much thought before using the expression. It is frequently intended as a vague fashion of commendation: indicating rather one's kindly feeling towards the person spoken of, than any accurate appreciation of what his moral merits are. Sometimes it means that the person spoken of has been useful to us, it matters little how. Thus a person who died some years since, who though legally a nobleman, was in fact one of the meanest and most contemptible wretches that ever disgraced humanity, spoke in his will of another human creature, who had found it possible to be even a meaner and more contemptible wretch than himself, as "an excellent man." And an excellent man, as you know, means a specially and remarkably good man.

My Christian friends, we have here one of those

phrases which mean a great deal more than most people who use them think. Just as truly as modern Astronomy has made the sun mean a great deal more than people understood it to mean before: Just as truly as modern Geography has taught us that the term the world includes a great deal more than people understood it to include before: so certainly has Christianity taught us that the phrase a good man means a great deal more than people once fancied it did; a great deal more than people even yet always remember that it means. Very many whom the world would call good men, are far indeed from coming up to the standard of the New Testament, of what a good man should be. I need not tell you that the phrase was in common use, before the Gospel told us its true meaning. Philosophers in old times were fond of talking about the good man: about his dignity, his happiness, his independence of outward circumstances, and the like: but then they commonly meant by the good man something quite different from that which the New Testament means. Their good man, in short, was not in any way a Christian. Although goodness, in many respects, is the same in the New Testament as in Socrates or Cicero, yet even in many details of conduct and feeling the one goodness is quite different from the other: and the two are utterly different in what they take for granted as to the great fundamental principles upon which all life and conduct go. And,

saying this, I am not speaking of that earlier way of thinking which made ferocious courage include almost all manly virtue: which made revenge a heroic duty; and held that there was nothing worthier of man than to devote himself to the destruction of those he deemed his enemies. I go on to better times, when mere martial greatness was sublimed into moral grandeur: into something which commends itself, even yet, to the sympathy of those whom the earlier notions affect with pure loathing and contempt: and even here, I say we are constrained to confess that the essential principles of that goodness are entirely different from the principles of Christianity. The type of the goodness lauded by heathen moralists is entirely unlike the type of goodness found in the Apostles, for example: found, let it be added, in our Blessed Saviour Himself. The Christian's great object in life is to please God: to be made like to Christ: Such motives were unknown to the philosophic good man. Knowing the gods *he* knew, it was the praise of one than whom old morality knew none better, that that which pleased his gods did not please him.* And the pure morality of such a man would have been revolted by the suggestion that there was one among them fit to be made any man's example. Then Christian humility, that virtue so essential in Christianity,—however approved it may be now by consciences and under-

* *Victrix causa diis placuit, sed victa Catoni!*

standings long enlightened by Christianity,—held no such place in the old list of virtues. I do not speak of pagan self-assertion as its opposite: but only remind you how the love of glory, the desire of the high estimation of men, was then esteemed as one of the highest and purest motives of human conduct. And such considerations as the living mainly for eternity: the walking by faith and not by sight; vital as they are in Christian morality,—could not possibly have been present in like manner in the minds of such as knew for certain no immortality. I do not say, not for one moment, that the pure morality of heathenism,—so far as it *was* pure,—was not good in those who strove after it, knowing only what they knew: I cast no doubt on the final state of the good among those who never heard of Christ. I believe, indeed, that every human soul that ever was saved, was saved only through Christ's great Atoning Sacrifice: but I believe, too, that the benefits of a great moral machinery are not necessarily confined to those who know all about it. Yet it is quite consistent with this to say, that the old goodness would not be goodness in us, knowing what God has told us now. We must learn, as we look back on it (let me say it in the strong words of Foster), "to assign these men in thought to another sphere, and to regard them as beings under a different economy with which our relations are dissolved: as marvellous specimens of a certain imperfect kind of moral greatness, formed

on a model foreign to true religion, which model is crumbled to dust and given to the winds."* You see, my friends, that if the Christian idea of what holiness and goodness are, be accepted as true, the old philosophic good man, the modern moral good man, may be far away from the present standard, by which we are bound to judge ourselves, and humbly to estimate others. A human being might be such as they, without one vestige of Christian principle: perfectly unactuated by faith and love towards Christ: and in God's view, no better than a self-sufficient, unrepenting sinner. A human being might quite well be what the world would call a moral man, a good man, a very good man, an uncommonly good man, as good a man as in this world you could expect to meet with: and yet all the while be what the New Testament calls "dead in trespasses and sins:" a lost sinner, needing to be sought and saved.

Now let us, in what remains of this discourse, seek to gain some distinct idea of what is the New Testament meaning of a good man. And by way of lights and directions, let us call to remembrance three texts of Scripture, which seem to hit off the special peculiarities, the distinctive marks and features, of the Christianly good man. And forasmuch as we are sure that the New Testament is

* Essay *On the Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion.* Letter VIII.

God's inspired Word to us, let us regard all this with a teachable and humble spirit. We come to learn from God's Word. It is there to teach us. So we need not be surprised if it tells us things we should not have found out for ourselves. It will never tell us anything which an enlightened conscience will not recognise as just and true, after due and serious reflection. But it may tell us things which, just at first, sound new and startling: and which we may have to turn over in our minds for a good while, and to get into the right way of looking at them, and to ask God's Spirit to deliver us from some natural prejudices against them, before we shall be able to accept them heartily.

First, there is a text in the New Testament which says this: that "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."* Now, I know that of late the meaning of these words has been otherwise explained. But several of the wisest and best of the Fathers of the Church read them without doubt as meaning that (in the words of Augustine) "all the life of the unbelieving is sin." Then you will remember the solemn assurance that "Without faith it is impossible to please God."† And upon such declarations of God's Word, the Church has founded the commonly-received doctrine, that "Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God: forasmuch as they

* Rom. xiv. 23. † Heb. xi. 6.

spring not of faith in Jesus Christ: yea rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin."* The Confession of Faith is even more explicit. "Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God."† Now, these statements have an austere sound: but they are not in any way unreasonable. It is in thorough consistence with the teaching both of reason and conscience that a deed which for its own substance is a good deed, may be done for such a motive, as that it shall not stamp the doer of it as a good man. To give alms to the needful and deserving, is a good thing in itself: but if the alms be given to be seen and obtain glory of men, the giving of the alms is a mere piece of self-seeking and self-conceit: and the giver is not a charitable person, but a vain and selfish person. And there is nothing unreasonable in saying, that faith in Christ, and devotion towards Him, and the earnest desire to do all as the work He gives to do,—make the great principle which ought to move the Christian in everything he

* *Thirty-nine Articles:* Article XIII. † Chap. xvi.

does: and that just in so far as any doing of a Christian man, even that which in itself is kindest and most beneficent, is not mainly inspired by that principle, just in that degree it lacks somewhat of being all that it ought to be: it fails of its possible perfection. It is well that when you can help a fellow-creature in distress, you do: it is so far well if you do it at the mere impulse of a kind heart: it would have been perfectly well in those who do not know what we know, to have done it under that impulse. But then, we who have heard of Christ: we who know what He did for us, and who know what we owe to Him,—everything in providence as well as everything in grace,—surely we fail of true gratitude towards Him and due remembrance of Him, if we do this without any thought of Him through Whom alone we are able to do it! And just in so far as we fail of the feeling which would be right in us, in that degree we do wrong. The sin of such a deed, done by an unbeliever now, who might have been a believer had he chosen, is one of those sins in which we *come short.* He did well, so far: but there was something more wanted. He ought to have gone further. There was something lacking: and to lack what is right, is wrong. And this is all that these stern-sounding articles say. Who can gainsay it? It is plainly reasonable; plainly true.

The second of the three texts to which I desire

your attention, is not contained in the New Testament, but in one of the Psalms. But doubtless you will accept it as of authority. In the Ninth Psalm * there stands this solemn declaration, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Now the great truth conveyed in the memorable text, is the identity of wickedness with ungodliness. To forget God, is, according to the standard of Holy Scripture, the same thing as to be wicked. To make this plain to such as are not Hebrew scholars, a word must be said. This Psalm is a piece of Hebrew poetry. Now, you know, the way in which we distinguish English poetry from prose, is by the poetry being divided into lines or verses, while the prose is not. But the way in which Hebrew poetry is known is this, speaking generally. In the first clause of a verse we find something said, —some truth expressed perhaps: and then in the second clause the same truth is repeated, or explained, or enforced. You will remember that verse in Isaiah, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found:" there is the first line of the verse. Then in the second we have just the same thing repeated, with a little variation: "Call ye upon Him while He is near." That is an example of a verse of Hebrew poetry. Now, to go back to the verse of the Psalm. You read first, "The wicked shall be turned into hell:" there is the first line. Then comes the second line: "Even all

* v. 17.

the nations that forget God." Now that second line is a repetition of what was said in the first. The people described in the first line as "the wicked," are the same people that are described in the second line, as "the nations that forget God." So, in the estimation of the inspired writer of the Psalm, "To forget God" is to be "wicked." Now let us consider this, we that are so ready to forget God. And let us mark here a second point of difference between God's good man, and the world's good man. When people, judging by a mere worldly standard, talk about any person and say he is a good man, they never think at all about whether he is remembering and serving and glorifying God, or not. When people, judging by a worldly standard, say that anything a person has done is a good deed, they never think at all about whether it was done in any degree from grateful love to God, and to the end of His glory, or not. If a man does a kind thing, or if a man lives a creditable honest life, they would say he was a good man, although there be lacking in his heart one trace of remembrance of God, or regard to His will and glory: although he never thinks of God from morning till night, any more than a poor inferior animal that knows nothing about God. You might walk through this life a practical atheist: "without God in the world:" and yet you might be so correct in your engagements, so true to your word, so pleasant in your address, so benevolent and kind in your conduct, as that all men should speak well of

you: as that you should pass for a remarkably good man. Yet all the while, you would be, tried by God's judgment, no better than one of those "wicked," who forget God. Not but what all that is honest, pure, and kind in your heart and life, is good so far as it goes: but then, believing what you believe about God and your obligation and duty to Him, it is not good in you. There is a fatal imperfection: You have fallen short. There is a vital thing lacking: and for lack of *that*, your goodness does not reach up to the standard of Revelation. And *that* is the standard which is required of you, who know God's revealed will: We say nothing as to those who knew, or know, it not.

And now we come to the third characteristic of the good man under this Christian light which shines on us. It is suggested by what is said of Barnabas in the verse in which my text stands: "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." Faith we have already seen to be needful: Here is something not yet spoken of. The good man is one who is "full of the Holy Ghost." He is one regenerated and sanctified by the Blessed Spirit of God. He is "a new creature" in Christ: he is being "renewed in the whole man after the image of God," and is daily "dying unto sin and living unto righteousness." There is nothing truly and sufficiently good in any human being, but what

the Spirit of God has inspired. Our natural bent is to evil rather than good. When we are evil, it is all too much in accordance with our make. When we are good, "By the grace of God we are what we are."

Some have regarded this as a hard and severe saying: not to add a manifestly unreasonable one. It seems to me anything but that. It does not ask us to deny or to abate by a jot anything good and merciful and heroic that ever has been in this world: It only tells us, what some never knew and some forget, what is the blessed Source of it all. Most of the things which have been brought as proofs that this Christian doctrine is not true, have no bearing on the question, one way or other. I know, of course, how you may point to the countless instances of man's heroic self-forgetting goodness and courage, and of woman's gentle and patient care and love, very little lower than the angels: and you may ask whether there have not been good deeds and good hearts in humanity, wherein Divine grace had no part; but to which something within us, not to be gainsaid or resisted, sets its seal as good, in the swelling heart at the mention of them, and the unrestrainable tear! Brethren, I welcome all these! I admit them heartily; and wish there were more to admit. And I say that in them all, there worked the grace of the Blessed Spirit of God. It is the teaching of the Church, and of the Bible; men's "ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of

Christ." * "It is God Which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." And while God's Word says so, reason has nothing to say against it. When the gush of kindness comes in the heart at the sight of suffering, prompting to the kind deed, *that* is the impulse of the Holy Spirit. How can you say No? You say it is the impulse of your own heart. You know no better. The Blessed Spirit's working weaves in with the natural working of mind and heart: you cannot say where the one ends and the other begins. Is that hard? Is that discouraging? To believe that the Holy Spirit is working in everything good that is done or thought or felt over this wide world: to believe that He is graciously working in those who never know whence comes the kindly impulse to the good deed, nor the new light cast on some perplexity to prompt the right and charitable thought! Surely the wisest and best of heathens would have been thoroughly at one with St Paul here: would have confessed that if they were enabled to do anything truly good, it was by a help from above: by a grace above nature; *whence*, they did not know, for they never had been told. It is kindly and encouraging, to hope and believe, that before Pentecost, before any revelation of Him, there was a secret Power at work over all the world: tending always to good, and never to evil; and that therein

* *Confession of Faith*, Chap. xvi. *Thirty-nine Articles*: Article X.

worked the Blessed Spirit of God! We do not ask you to throw aside alien good, and to deny it: we only ask you to remember Whence it comes!

Thus we have sought to discern the special characteristics of the Good Man, now in these days of Gospel light. Doubtless, now, the true Christian is the good man. Faith in Christ: Godliness of heart: and the whole nature sanctified by the Holy Ghost: these make the Christianly good man. These make meet for duty and trial here: for rest hereafter. And what can we say more, than to ask that it may please God to work in each of us all these things, by the grace of His Blessed Spirit!

XIII.

THE GREAT CHANGE.

"For I know that Thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."—JOB xxx. 23.

THERE is a famous picture, by a great painter, which represents a scene which so touched one of the most charming essayists in our language, that time after time in his writings he recurs to the scene, and to the reflections it might be supposed to suggest. The picture represents a company of rustics, who lived long ago in the simple Arcadian country and age, coming on a sunshiny holiday upon an unknown grave, in a lonely place, marked by a sculptured stone. It bore no name, and no date: and all the inscription on it was this: "I once lived in Arcadia too." *

Of course there was something there that appealed to sympathy. And the painter has shown his skill in depicting, so far as face and gesture could depict, the feelings with which those who read the words recognised the silent claim of kindred on the part of him

* *Et in Arcadiâ ego.* The picture is by Poussin; the essayist is Hazlitt.

who slept below. They could readily imagine what his life had been, whose life had been just such as theirs. He had looked on the same scenes: known the like pleasures and pains. What they were, he had been. What he was, they would be.

It is with something of the like sympathy and interest that we read the words of this text. This book of Job is the oldest book in the world: and it tells us the history of one of the early fathers of mankind. Thousands of years have passed since Job died: but here we see him looking on to the future for the day of his dying: and there is something strange in finding that spoken of as something to come, which has been past for all these ages. Then the world has seen many changes since the patient patriarch died: Men may be supposed to be wiser, if they be not happier: We know a thousand things which Job did not: We speak a language which was not formed till centuries after he was in his grave. Yet this simple sentence wakens in us a sympathy that bridges over all difference between us and him. We feel that for all the primeval days in which he lived, and all the mighty changes which influences that have worked since then have made upon the human race, he too was our brother. And all the distance between Job and ourselves seems lost in a great equality, when we take for our own his ancient words, and say "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living!"

You see the subject to which I now ask your attention, only for a very little time. I have never before made it the matter of an entire discourse. No doubt, the subject is one on which an infinity has been said and written by innumerable human beings, from the author of Job downwards: yet though it might well be vulgarised by having been, for many a day, the stock resort of every incompetent person who by cheap means has aimed at the pathetic; still the theme is one which never can grow old. And the experience and the heart of most men convert into touching eloquence even the poorest formula of set phrases about the tremendous Fact. Yet who that would worthily seek to address his fellow-creatures on this subject, but must know that words are perfectly vain here, to express what he would say, what all have thought and felt? Then, though the subject be old, the thing is everlastingly new. The death which has passed on others is over and gone: that which is waiting for us is a new thing yet to be. Death is old as the flowers are old; because fresh as they spring now, they sprang a thousand years since. It is old as the morning is old, because fresh as it dawns now, it dawned on the eyes of men before the Deluge. But each flower that springs is a new thing, fresh from the hand of God: each morning that dawns is a new thing, though there have been thousands and thousands like it. And so, death is new. It will not matter at all to each of us, when it is our turn to die,

that millions and millions have died before us: Each of them died for himself, and you must die for yourself: and doubtless, when death comes, it will be something the like of which you never felt before. It is strange, indeed, that this thing, this death, whose name is so ready on our lips, whose name we have joined with the names of so many friends and neighbours, looks such a new thing when we feel it coming on ourselves, or see it sapping the life of one who is dear to us!

"I *know*," says Job, "that Thou wilt bring me to death." It is not I think, I daresay, I reckon on it. There is entire certainty: "I *know*." And whence came the certainty? How did Job know?

He knew, for one thing, from what he had seen in the case of his fellow-men around him. People died in the land of Uz, just as they die here. We do not well know in what hope or belief of a better life and a better world they laid themselves down to pass away from this world and this life: we cannot well imagine how either dying or living were able to face death when they knew nothing beyond it: but any way, they died. There were no Christian churches then, beneath whose sacred shade rich and poor might sleep the long sleep together: though now, after Christ has brought immortality to life, it is with the words of Job that the minister of religion meets the dead at the churchyard gate in a sister-country; as I

heartily wish he did too in our own: but then there were desolate places where kings and counsellors lay still and were quiet, where the wicked ceased from troubling and the weary were at rest. And what we have seen death do, Job had also seen: his own beautiful words tell us he knew that death could take the infant at the threshold of life, as well as the great, the wise, and the aged. And all this was not the doing of a day, or a year, or a century. It had been the way of the world since the world began. Death appeared almost before the days in Eden had time to grow indistinct in the remembrance of Adam: and no man, save one, had escaped it since. It was no hasty conclusion that the great tide which had swept away all past generations should sweep away that which was living then: and Job might well say, "*I know.*"

But he had other reasons for knowing, of more personal concern. The sufferings he himself was enduring pointed onward, with no uncertain hand, to the day of his dissolution. What were these, but the forerunners of something that would "change the countenance" more than the sprinkled ashes: What were these but the shading-off (as it were) between vigorous health with its cheerful strength and alacrity; and death with its imperturbable repose? The separation of soul and body does not, for the most part, gently steal upon man, a quiet sleep from which there is no waking in this world; but which gradually and painlessly takes away strength and consciousness

from heart and limbs. Neither does death commonly come with a sudden shock,—one sharp pang and over: not perceived the moment before it comes, as it never can be the moment after. Dissolution is, in most cases, only the conclusion of a dreary series of unrest and suffering, which by degrees wears the sufferer down to the house, to his bed, to his grave. And Job knew that those great sufferings which had already laid him low in the dust, would only be finishing the work they had begun when they had mingled his mortal frame with it.

Well, we have Job's reasons for knowing, as concerns ourselves, what he knew. There are many things of which we are in ignorance: many of which we are in doubt: but we *know* that God will bring us to death, and to the house appointed for all living. Some good Christian people have indeed thought that the end of this world is perhaps so near, that many now living may not have to pass to another life through the gate of death: but I cannot say less than that if the end of this world be near, it is not because there is not room for it to go on improving, morally and spiritually, for many a day and year: and as for those who are not to die, there awaits *them* a not less solemn change. We know, as Job knew, by unvaried experience: by indications in ourselves: and we know by many references and declarations in God's Word. Generation upon generation has arisen since my text was first written: but each has followed

that which preceded it, to the place where all have gone and all must go. Every city of the living has its quieter city of the dead: every village and hamlet must have its green spot with the quiet graves. And how very many, of all we have ever known and cared for, are gone! It startles us, sometimes, to think that we are the survivors of so many who started with us in the race of life. We too, like Job, know the meaning of pain: not merely what the thing is, but what it points on to. And many little indications in ourselves begin early to suggest the approaches of that which must prevail at last. The first gray hairs are as a slight but sure premonition. Lessening activity and energy of body and mind begin to tell their story, soon after middle life is reached. A weariness grows upon us, which must end in the last long sleep. Yes, we are quite sure what is coming: Like Job, *we know.*

"I know," said Job, "that *Thou* wilt bring me to death." You see, the patriarch refers his coming end to the working of Almighty God. Not the wasting and painful disease that was preying on his body: not the deep anguish that was weighing down his heart: not the loss of his wealth: not the death of his children: none of these was the thing that would bring him to the grave. They might be instruments: but they were instruments in a Higher Hand. Job rises above the second causes: and goes direct to

Him in whose Hand these are. *Thou* wilt bring me to death: Thou, and none save Thee: Till the time Thou hast set, a warring world could not extinguish this little spark of life: and when Thy day has come, there is nothing in nature so little but it may send me from this world! Let us do as Job did. It is God that will bring us to death in our appointed season: it was God that took away from us those whom we have lost. We take all things best from His Hand: wisdom and love direct all that *He* does: we can trust Him for that, even when we cannot see that it is so. Now, I do not say this to counsel that kind of resignation which comes of fatalism: God appoints the hour of our death just exactly as He appoints the time and manner of every other event in the history of each of us: He appoints it (that is) so that we remain under the solemn obligation to use the means within our reach to lengthen life and prevent death: and it will not do that wicked laziness and improvidence should justify that disobedience to God's natural laws, the laws of health and life, which costs every year so many lives, on the ground that God appoints life and death. God permits sinful and foolish human beings to do many things He does not approve, and for which He punishes and will punish them. And we are just as solemnly bound to obey the laws of health, as to obey any other of God's laws. If infant life, and youthful life, are sacrificed shamefully in our cities, through lack of

pure air and water and drainage, *that* is not God's doing, any more than any other grievous sin is God's doing. He has made His mind as to these things perfectly plain, by a revelation for which the Bible was not needed: He has revealed His will to us through our own faculties, and our own power of observation. And by these He has made His command, *Thou shalt breathe pure air*, as plain, and as binding, as *Thou shalt not steal*, or *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.* But what I mean is, that when we have diligently used all means, all skill, for the preservation of some precious life, and yet all is vain: or when some awful inevitable accident has befallen (and though there are very few inevitable accidents, such things do come); then it is good for us to remember Who ordered all this, and so to learn the psalmist's great lesson of resignation; "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it!"

"I know," said Job, "that Thou wilt bring *me* to death." You see, it is not "Thou wilt bring all men to death," "Thou will bring the human race to death." No, Job singles himself out from all the crowd of mankind; it is, "Thou wilt bring *me*." Now, there is no subject in regard to which there is so singularly anomalous and inconsistent a way of thinking and feeling, as there is about our great change. Not that I accept without reservation that

line of a saturnine writer of verses, who might probably affect us more by his solemn reflections if we had the least reason to believe that he felt them himself,—the line which says, "All men think all men mortal, but themselves." There are many hours in which that is not true. And yet there are hours in which men speak of the mortality of the race, just as they speak of the depravity of the race; silently, half-consciously, making a reservation in their own favour. But Job looked death in the face: he speaks of it as coming specially to himself: he only incidently alludes to the fate of all living. Let us do like him. I do not mean that any good would follow from that never-ceasing anticipation of our own departure in which good men have tried to live, and tried with not much success; God's plain purpose being that there should be long and busy seasons in our life in which the thought of death is no more than latently present with us; but I think that now and then, lying on our bed at night, walking alone on a summer evening, sitting quietly in God's house, it would be good to seek to realise what is meant by death to ourselves. The thing is coming: It is surely right sometimes to look at it. We cannot be sure how it will come; but there are strong likelihoods. Think of the sick-chamber with its shaded light: of the thorny bed of pain: of the weary tossings by day and night: of the long seasons of watching in those midnight hours when all the world is still,

Think of the change, so absolute and complete, the change that makes all things new, from your former way of life to this reality of illness, that makes the very hours look strange. Think of hope struggling with despair: your heart sometimes bounding back to the world, too congenial to us all,—and sometimes reconciling itself to the last solemn change. Think at length of the message that all hope is past, that man can do no more for you,—that message which always startles however long you expected it: then the utter forgetting of very many things you once cared much for, and the strange crowding on the mind of old forgotten thoughts and words. Think of the last farewell: of the sinking heart burdened perhaps with many cares for those you leave behind you: and then you can speak no more, and see the faces around no more: and you feel how truly men must die alone. For though kind friends have come along with you every stage of your life, and kept you kind company, they must leave you now, and you go on by yourself, a separate soul alone in your own awful personality. Now all this will be to each of you. Into the presence of God, into the other world, launching away all alone, each of us must go. The little child, whom its mother would hardly leave a minute out of her presence, must waken up on that distant shore alone for the first time in its little life, with no kind mother near. The soul passes away from human sight and knowledge: but you may think of the sick-chamber,

a little since filled with mourning friends, a little since the place of your last words and last breath, now silent and deserted. A rigid figure lies on that bed: it is you. Those who loved you best shrink as they touch it: for there is something fearful in the body without the soul. In a little they bear it to the last resting-place, and leave it there alone. The night comes down, and you are there by yourself; dead among dead generations. Day dawns, and the busy world goes on without you: no smile is gone from nature's face; and the place that knew you best never grieves for your absence. Months pass on: and the wounded hearts that mourned for you are healed: you are little missed, save by one or two. Years are past, and your friends have followed you: your name and theirs are gone and forgot. Now, that is what death, so far as sense can see it, has been to innumerable millions: Let each of us here present think, Now, that is death to *me*.

We bless God, through Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and the Life; that this is not all. But let us finish Job's words first.

"Bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." There needs no oracle to tell us what house is that: There is but one, narrow and lowly, where all men meet. In the dust whence all were taken at the first, all meet again. This is the quiet home for which the monarch exchanges his palace, the poor savage his leaf-covered shed, the far-away

settler his log-hut, the beggar his sorry shelter. It is an old house; the oldest house of all. It was before the tower of Babel: the long years of the Pyramids dwindle before its vaster age: the proudest piles ever reared must decay before it can. It is a solemn house: always a solemn house to all who feel rightly. Whether the daisies grow over, and the green grass: or the dim vault of the ancient church shelter it from the sunshine and the dew. Whether the freshly-turned earth tell the tenant went to it but yesterday; or the sunken stone and level turf speak of many a year. It is an expectant house. For all the generations it has received, there is room yet: room for all who can come. It is "appointed for all living." Solemn thought, that every human being who now walks this world, has some place that is even now waiting for him: some place where it is decreed he shall sleep till the Resurrection. Where that place is, not many can certainly tell. We may be passing it in our daily walks: we may know it familiarly. Or, it may be in some strange and distant region, where our native tongue is seldom spoken, and whose name we have hardly heard. But, be it near or far away: be it amid the ashes of our kindren, or where none of our race ever lived or died: be it near to the house where we were born, or be it where no friendly step will ever come to it; there is a place that is expecting each of us: a place appointed for us: a place that will not be complete till

we are there! O clods of the valley, waiting till we come to you, ye cannot have long to wait. There are days of life coming perhaps: something to suffer, something to enjoy: friends to make, cares to distract, work to do. But how little, how passing, all these things seem: when I remember that even now my grave is "appointed," and my last home waiting for me!

And now, "If a man die, shall he live again?" That is the great question. The great question when Job put it. The great question yet.

It is a question which once, and for many a day and year, would have been very hard to answer. It is a question very hard to answer yet, if we had to judge by what we see. Rather, perhaps, very easily answered: but the answer would be No. For, at death, the soul seems to go out, like the extinguished flame. As for the old familiar body, by which your friends knew you, the change is sadder still; and there is deep humiliation about it. Oh, "sown in corruption: sown in dishonour: sown in weakness:" how true the inspired words! But the end is the quiet dust: "Dust we are, and to dust we return." And then, the only farther characteristic of death, as sense shows it is to us, is utter Hopelessness. The soul is gone; the body is dust: There is no appearance of any change. No one comes back from the undiscovered country: Can there be an undiscovered

country at all? And there is not a trace, as yet, of any resurrection of the body. If there never were to be any, things could not look more like it than they do. Christian generation after generation has been laid down to rest in our grand burying-place, within the hearing of the sea: the green turf has risen, through the accumulation of human dust: and there it all remains; it has never stirred: Why should it ever? O how awful, how hopeless a thing death is, when you know nothing more of it than sense can show! Aye, or reason find out; for it finds out nothing at all. I do not value at a pin's fee the light of nature (as it is called) on this matter. I never heard any argument from *that* for immortality which could not be easily answered: I have heard some that spoke to the heart, eager to believe; never one that could convince the head. And for resurrection, there is no natural argument at all. I have indeed stood beside a grave, where was inscribed a verse, familiar to many of you, that begins, "Shall I be left forgotten in the dust, While fate relenting lets the flowers revive?" I want something firmer to rest upon than the analogy, even if the fact were stated truly. But it is not stated truly. The flowers do not revive. Other flowers, like them, come: but the old flowers that died do not come back. As argument, *that* is not worth a feather.

We thank God, through Jesus Christ, that He did not leave us to find out for ourselves whether "if a

man die, he shall live again." He has told us: and now we know. "Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." He has abolished the old death: the name does not mean the same thing now. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." The redeemed soul, in the moment of death, passes into perfect rest and holiness and happiness in the Saviour's presence: and as for the poor body, "we know Him, and the power of His resurrection." "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality!" And "So, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

See how my text, dreary and hopeless if we knew no more than it says, changes, when we read it by the blessed light of the glorious gospel! We dare hardly speak of these things, save in God's own comfortable words: so sure, so rich, so many!

"I know that Thou wilt bring me to death." But "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

"I know that Thou wilt bring me to death." "Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he

live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die!"

"I know that Thou wilt bring me to death," said Job. But he said words too, whose meaning we know perhaps better than he did.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

"I know that Thou wilt bring me to death." But death will be nothing to fear, if we are washed in Christ's blood, and sanctified by His Spirit. Wherefore this day we earnestly ask anew,—ask anew though we have asked thousands of times before,—that it may be so with every one of us!

XIV.

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."—GAL. vi. 14.

THERE are words which call up before the mind a vague conception of something grand and magnificent, not very exactly defined. Foremost among such words is that which catches the eye first when you look at the text. Glory: a vague thing indeed; and intangible: yet somehow clad in lights, and invested with associations, that quicken the bounding pulse of youth, and stir even the calmer heart of mature years. The desire of eminence, of reputation, of that which in some humble degree may stand under the generic name of glory, is a thing that is felt, in some measure, by almost every one who has risen above the pressure of the bare physical wants. And doubtless, thinking of the grand abstraction itself,—since the world was young, through all its long ages, and over all its immeasurable extents, here is the thing which, above all others, has been schemed for, laboured for, lived for, and died for. We turn

away, from the thought of glory sought on battlefields and in senates, to think, with a deeper interest, how one, not to be forgot but with our language,* took "labour and intent study for his portion in this life," that so the delights he had scorned, and the laborious days he had lived, might leave their memorial to after times, in "something so written as they should not willingly let it die." And I suppose there is a season in the life of many, in which it seems a grand thing; an end worth much toil and anxiety; to rise conspicuous above one's fellow-creatures: to have your name one that shall fire ambitious spirits: to be pointed to as a noble instance of what the energy and perseverance of man can do: to be known by your fame to numbers who otherwise never saw nor knew you, and whom you will never see nor know: and while hundreds of thousands die almost without notice extending further than their immediate kin, that your removal from the world should seem a great event. That season, of course, goes soon: and "glory's thrill is over," unless in the case of very exceptionally enthusiastic folk: but a time may be recalled in which with real sympathy one could recall the poetic sentiment, that "To live in hearts we leave behind, Is not to die!"

It is no part of the purpose of this discourse, to dwell on the vanity of worldly glory: and a less practical end could hardly be contemplated by any

* Milton.

preacher. I have spoken of worldly glory for the sake of contrast with that mentioned in the text. We have here the words of a man who, quite apart from inspiration, was one of the greatest men that ever lived. Think of his fiery energy: think of his dauntless courage: think of the actual work he did. At the feet of Gamaliel he had acquired the best learning of his nation: By the strictness of his life he had surpassed the straitest among the Pharisees: The East was studded with the churches he had planted: The languages of all tribes and peoples came ready to his lips: and in the body or out of the body he had been caught up into the third heaven. The words he wrote were to be read in the hearing of men from the Ganges to the Mississippi; and were to form essential part of the laws of a kingdom that should see all other kingdoms out. Now, what is the actual fame of the greatest hero, or the most illustrious author, to that of the Apostle Paul? How widely known is his name: How conspicuous is he among, and above, his fellow-creatures: How often is he in the thoughts, and the discourse, of men: How true it is that not to be well acquainted with all the particulars of his life and history, would be taken as proof of the most deplorable ignorance: How every thing he did, and every event that befell him, has furnished matter of curiosity, of investigation, of discussion: What ascendancy and influence he has exerted over society, and the views and feelings of society, from his day to ours:

How every word he wrote has been scanned and sifted, as if men were sure it must contain something that would repay the toil! Show us the philosopher whose words of wisdom have sunk so deep, and been remembered so well: Show us one man who can say he is seeking to practise in his daily life the precepts and advices of Plato, for every thousand that are praying to live mindful of the words of St Paul: Show us the beloved friend whose letters have been read and re-read by those dearest to him, half so often and half so earnestly as St Paul's have been by multitudes beyond number. From his tent-maker's shed; from his Roman prison; from his unknown grave; he exercises a sway over the minds of men, the best minds of the race, to which the empire of Alexander was narrow indeed. Not a day shines on the world, but his name is in the thoughts, and his words on the lips of millions. Yet so lightly did he hold such renown as this, that he seems to have thought it wrong to waste one care upon it: and duty and inclination speak together in the memorable text, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The meaning of this plainly is, that in the ordinary sense of the word, St Paul would not glory at all. The feeling he expresses, when he speaks of glorying in the cross, is something widely different from that self-idolisation which is at the root of the quest and the enjoyment of earthly glory. It was indeed a

feeling as warm and stirring as any which man could know, not centring in self, and self-aggrandisement, but in the Person, the Work, the Religion of his Lord.

Now St Paul, though enthusiastic, was not what we understand by an enthusiast. His was not one of those weak minds that may be carried away by a sudden fervour, to make some strong declaration for which there is little ground, and the extravagance of which they themselves would the next hour be ready to acknowledge. We may be sure these words express no crude and hasty sentiment: but that what St Paul felt on the long-departed day when he wrote this verse, he felt the next day, and the next again, and every day of his life. And what we know of him assures us yet farther, that there must be good reason for his esteeming the cross a thing so glorious, that in comparison with it other things had no glory at all. Now, taking the cross to mean, what here of course it does mean, the entire great work of redemption and salvation done by Christ's life and specially by His suffering and death; we shall doubtless find the reason why St Paul held this estimate of it, when we consider two things about it: first, What it is: and next, What it can do.

As for what it is, we know that Christ crucified is "the power of God and the wisdom of God:" the gospel scheme of salvation is God's especial and chiefest work. It is, beyond question, the great theme of all His revelation to man: All other matters

hold a subordinate place there. And does it seem to any as though in saying this, God's other works are disparaged and slighted? Does it seem as if this earth, in its vast spreadings of land and sea, carried back our thoughts to a work, testifying not less weightily to the mighty strength and delicate skill of the great Creator? Does it seem as if the heavings up of huge mountains, Alp or Himmaleh; and the waste of ocean, weltering and toiling away to the horizon; could tell you of a work as great? Or does it seem as if there rose before us the thought of a task, mighty as omnipotence itself could do, when we think how vast His power, how unimaginable the diversity of His attention, without Whose direct agency not a flower blooms in the desert, not a ripple sweeps the surface of the unexplored sea,—when we think of that providential care which can divide itself so infinitely, as to tend every heart that beats, every leaf that opens, every sparrow that falls; taking note not more of the grand politics of empires, than of the affairs of every village, and the household concerns of every dwelling? Well, mighty works though Creation and Providence be, Redemption is a mightier! A word sufficed to call a world into being: and the care of nature costs Omnipotence and Omniscience neither fatigue nor perplexity: but to redeem our sinful race cost the Incarnation, Suffering, and Death of the Son of God. We come, speaking of these things, to mysteries of the faith: but there is no more vital Christian verity

than this,—that to work out our salvation, it was needful that the Divine Creator should dwell for years, in the likeness of sinful man, in the midst of a sinful world: that His blessed feet should wander wearily over one little province of His own great kingdom: that He should endure agony that cannot be reckoned; and die a death of unutterable woe. Now, unless God shows the uttermost disregard to the greatness of the end when He appoints the means, how immeasurably greater a thing than Creation or Providence must the work of Redemption be!

Yes, many things are God's work. "Our Father worketh hitherto" is the strain that is told by all things. It is not a mere fancy that the stars as they shine are for ever proclaiming the Divinity of the Hand that made them. It is something more than a poetic thought, that in the thunder of the mountains and the roar of the waves you may hear something of the great Creator. It is not an imagination, but a substantial truth, that there is one thing concerning which the wide universe is always speaking to the docile ear: that every leaf as it grows, and every stream as it murmurs, every hill with its green slopes in summer, and all the face of the earth renewed in spring, has something to tell us of the wisdom that planned them, and the strength that made and upholds them all. Hints of amazing wisdom and power lie scattered over the length and breadth of creation: but it is in the plan of redemption, in the cross of

Christ, that we see all God's attributes mirrored and harmonised: His forgiving love beside His perfect justice: His tender sympathy shown in Christ's heart and life: His true desire that all should be saved, that sin and sorrow should cease: His unfailing purpose that this SHALL BE in the end: and the precious revelation, beyond that of a Blessed Redeemer, of a mighty Sanctifier and Comforter: a Helper through the manifold provocations and temptations of these weak hearts and this ensnaring life,—a Sustainer under all cares, troubles, and fears: a hundred blessed and most needful facts and truths concerning which earth and sea and sky are dumb!

Such thoughts might have led St Paul to the resolution expressed in the text, to glory in nothing other than the cross of Christ. But with yet greater force there comes to us the second thing we purposed to think of: It is what this great scheme of redemption can do.

Herein lies the glory of the cross; in the good it does. And this great machinery; heralded by prophetic voices, matured by the slow working of the Almighty age after age, wrought out finally by the death of Christ; we might, before actual experience, have been sure that it would not abide amid sinning and suffering men, a great presence that would do no good. And what can it do? Rather ask what it can not do: It can do everything. There is not a thing

we truly need, that it cannot give us. There is not a change that ought to be produced in ourselves or upon this world, that it cannot effect. There is not a sin it cannot wash away; not a sorrow it cannot comfort; not the hard heart it cannot soften; not the depraved soul it cannot renew. In a word, the cross can give us all we want, and make us all we ought to be.

It is but by way of remembrance that the things are said which I go on to say: but the old story cannot be repeated too often. Let us recall the main benefits we owe to Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Is it true that every one of us here has times without number broken God's law? is it true that God has seriously said that He will awfully punish all such transgression? is it true, then, that every one of us, as a transgressor, as a sinner against God, has a title which no one can dispute, to the woful inheritance of a place in that outer darkness, never spoken of more awfully than by the Kindest and most Merciful Himself? If all this be true, what is the first and most pressing need of every man? Is it not the pardon of sin? And it is plain that nothing we can do can ever supply this urgent need. For every sin is a thing for ever: it has taken its place in the realm of things past, and there it abides: for no human hand can unlock the gates of that inexorable kingdom, and make as though it were not that which once has been.

There is but one thing in all this universe that can cut the link between us and our sins, our responsibilities: and that is the grand saving instrumentality briefly named by St Paul as the cross of Christ. "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree." He "blotted out the handwriting that was against us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." And so it comes to be, as St Paul said at Antioch, that "through this Man is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins."

But then, that we may get this forgiveness, we must have repentance towards God and faith in Christ. And we feel that by ourselves we are not able to repent; are not able to believe. Here is another want. But this is provided for too. There is a Blessed Spirit Who will work in us all that which by ourselves we cannot do. The conditions in ourselves on which pardon may be obtained, are freely given us and wrought in us. God "grants repentance unto life." "Faith is the gift of God."

So much for one gracious doing of the cross of Christ. "The Lamb of God takes away sin." You see how the soul we found with a title to perdition, becomes a soul with the title to heaven. But more is needed yet.

Is it true that all the sins we have done are the outcome of a sinful nature? is it true that so long as our nature remains unchanged, our conduct and life

cannot grow vitally better, any more than thorns can bear grapes? is it true that with this nature unchanged, even if we were admitted to heaven, we should feel no pleasure in it and find its inhabitants most uncongenial companions? If all this be true, is it not plain that after pardon has been given, there still remains the great need of a holy heart and nature? Yes: and the Saviour's cross supplies this need too: He "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." He sends us the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Blessed Trinity, to renew, to sanctify. By His gracious working, we are "born again:" we become "a new creature:" thus getting the germ of a character on which He daily works, bending all things and all events to instruments and allies in the great process of sanctification: imperfect, sadly imperfect here; but in the hour of death perfected. The title to heaven was given before: here is the meetness for it.

I have wished, shortly, and in a systematic fashion familiar to us, to sketch the working of the great Atonement on a single saved soul. Diverse as is the experience of Christian people, yet it may confidently be said that here is an outline of the history of each among the great company of the redeemed. You know, Christian friends, whether all this be a little portion of sound systematic theology; or a plain

statement of most certain facts in your innermost life. And now, standing back, as it were, from the great Verity of Christ's Sacrifice, to look at it, how many thoughts arise in less orderly array! We think of enemies reconciled to God through His Son, and souls afar off brought near: of a way in which we may boldly approach the throne of grace, making mention of our Redeemer's atoning death and never-ceasing intercession as the alone ground on which we hope to be heard and answered: and of death abolished by the life and immortality He brought to light, and more gloriously still, by "the power of His resurrection:" and of the feeling of sympathetic trust with which amid all human weakness we can now look up to God, made manifest in the Face of His incarnate and suffering Son; and of multitudes which no man can number, gathered from all lands and all ages, who stand before the throne, and before the Lamb, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the crucified Saviour. We remember, thankfully, how now, in our darkest days, the cross has given us a Blessed Comforter, Who breathes into the heart such peace as the world cannot give: how now, amid all earthly losses, we may feel secure in the thought that our treasure is laid up beyond the reach of robbery or decay; how now, amid all present perplexities, ignorances, and unsatisfying questionings, we may anticipate, what some among us esteem as the very chiefest relief of a better

world, the day when these shall be resolved. You remember that now, all because our Saviour died, the worst bitterness of death is past away: for now when for the last time in this life we hold the chilling hand of one dear dying, in the blank thought that we must part, we know the parting is but for a little time: we look to meet again, through God's grace, in that heavenly country where partings are unknown. You remember that now, only because our Saviour died, and rose the Resurrection and the Life, we are able to lay the Christian dead in the grave in the sure and certain hope of a joyful rising: we give to the heedless keeping of the earth the face and the form we knew: knowing that they are not done with; that the body, still united to Christ, rests gently till the great resurrection. You remember that now, through Him crucified, there is blessed hope in the presence of a sorrow which, before Him, we wonder how human hearts could bear at all: through Him, we bear up, when we see, unwillingly see, that years are telling upon those dearest to us: It is because He died that we can bear, without a heart-break, to see the silvering hair, the tremulous hand, the tottering step, the enfeebled mind, that tell us so sadly that in a little while, if God spare us, we shall have to tread the path of our life alone, without that kind heart's love, and that revered hand's guidance. You remember that now, only through our Redeemer, we are able to look onward to the Golden City, the New

Jerusalem, the country which strangers and pilgrims on earth have sought through these long years: knowing little of it, but knowing that He is there: that there all that good will be found, that light and peace, that even joyousness, that holiness of heart, that elevation of spiritual communion, which never were found here. And now, when you remember that all these great things, so feebly presented to you, come of the work and sacrifice of our Redeemer, can you not feel within your own hearts something of that which burned in St Paul's when he wrote these words of the text? What wonder if, reckoning up what it can do, he said "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ!"

We have thought, you see, of our Blessed Lord's sacrifice as working on the individual soul. There are larger views. We might think what it has done to tame, civililise, and elevate the race: to cast out monstrous cruelties, to develop human sympathy, to bring in moral light where it was blackness of darkness before. Anything that is even of worldly worth comes in the track of the knowledge of Christ, and Him crucified. "Thy kingdom come," is a prayer not only for all spiritual and moral good: it is a prayer for all political and all material! If each of us; if all around us; if all the nations of the earth; were what Christianity would make them; acted out in their dealings with one another its teaching and

spirit; what a happy world this would be! Surely the Apostle, with a prophetic eye, looked on to days, yet far in the distant Future, when all these things shall be! Seeing their glory; their peacefulness and purity and kindness; evil gone, and good everywhere: well might he, with a heart lifted up by the sublime prospect, cry aloud, in words our souls would echo, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

I have been careful, speaking of the cross of Christ, to use the words in the sense in which the great Apostle no doubt meant them,—as meaning our Blessed Saviour's great sacrificial work, consummated on the tree. It is curious, indeed, to think how the actual form of the cross, which till His death had only associations of shame and horror, has been a new thing ever since He died: Not now an engine of shameful and torturing dismissal from this life, to be hidden away as something by all means to be forgotten; but blazoned before all eyes by the Christian Church as its visible Symbol, the sacred Symbol of its dearest hopes. The days came, indeed, in which a superstitious value was attached to the material emblem: and even as good King Hezekiah was constrained to break in pieces the Brazen Serpent because the people had come to burn idolatrous incense to it, so good men deemed themselves bound to fight against the ancient usage which

marked those baptized into Christ with the sign of His cross: and from the gable of parish church and cathedral the cross was rent away. But the danger is past, here, and now: This is not the country nor the age of superstition: We are able to recur to what is pleasing and venerable in æsthetics without the least fear that it will lead us too far: and we Christian people may well rejoice that in so many directions we may see that which reminds us of the Sacrifice which is our salvation. You know why the ground plan of this church is what it is: you trace the venerable form yet in the ruins of our once majestic cathedral: and rude as was the still more ancient church on the height above the harbour, yet the form is there that speaks of Christ's death and atonement. After centuries, the crosses, torn down from the gables of the great church of Glasgow, went up again; not a voice raised against the restoration: and wherever a decorous place of worship is built for the use of the Church, or of any other communion in this country, the ancient symbol is held out again, without doubt or fear. Borne aloft thus before all men; shown wherever our eyes are turned; surely if days should ever return wherein the doctrine of Christ's atoning sacrifice shall be held back, there will be emblems everywhere to rebuke the unfaithful preachers who shall keep back the blessed gospel of Christ crucified! May God forbid that those days should ever be! Rather be it the preacher's resolu-

tion, as was Paul's, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified!". And the sum of all his message: "We preach Christ crucified: unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness: but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

XV.

THE PEACEFUL PILGRIMAGE.

"See that ye fall not out by the way."—GEN. xlv. 24.

SO spake the patriarch Joseph, as he sent his brethren away, after he had made himself known to them. The sons of Jacob had found their brother, so long parted from them by their own heartless wickedness; so bitterly mourned by their aged father: They had found him in the great place of Governor over all the land of Egypt. But his sudden rise had not prevailed to change his kind heart: He was as when he was a boy. The Governor of Egypt was the brother still: and never were tears of deeper sincerity than those he shed, as he made himself known. For their wicked cruelty towards himself he made the best excuse it would admit, as he showed how through it (though no thanks to them) there had wrought the over-ruling hand of God: and in the earnest questioning as to the health and welfare of his father, so long unseen, we get assurance the most pleasing, that if the stripling shepherd, the poor forgotten prisoner in the dungeon, had climbed to the height of rank and power

in that country of early civilisation and enlightenment, he had taken with him the warm feelings of a lowlier station: he had saved the home-bred heart. And surely, in the judgment of all right-thinking people, that most amiable of all the patriarchs was a nobler man, with that kind affection in his bosom and those unfeigned tears upon his cheek, than in all the greatness of the land of Egypt. He could not know, indeed, that the story of his various lot was to come by so straight a road to the heart of millions after he was gone: that it was to be cherished among the dearest recollections of our childhood; and to touch us even when hardened somewhat by the wear of years.

There is one little point in the story, in which the whole spirit of the man looks out: It is that related in this text. Laden with the good things of Egypt, and bearing a message to their aged father which *he* would think the best thing that ever came from Egypt, they are just setting out for their father's pinched home: and lingering around them as though loth to lose sight of them, Joseph stands to see them go. He has said to them all he has to say, and the little caravan is just departing: but one last thought arises, one parting advice. Go, it is as though he said, and God be with you: let the way look short and the sky smile its brightest: But there is one thing that will spoil every earthly blessing, that will embitter the journey that ought to be pleasantest; and so beware of that thing: "See that ye fall not out by the way."

We can well believe that the words were seriously said, and in like manner listened to. For they touched a link of association that brought back the past. Something of mild reproof mingled with their thoughtful kindliness. The thought of a brother once hated without a reason, once sold to strangers for a slave, would remind all, reprovingly, that there might be bitter and woful difference between the children of one parent. And as the brethren led away their asses, it would be with bowed heads and in silence: Surely for *that* journey at least it would be all unity and peace amid the little company plodding on its way. The history of that journey is not written: but doubtless the brothers did not "fall out by the way."

That journey is long since over, and the travellers dead. Many centuries part us from those distant days. Yet we can well understand that not only to the little company of Jacob's sons was the counsel in the text needful and valuable. And we may think, not quite fancifully, that purged from all that was merely temporary and transient, as voices are that speak to us from days so long departed, the patriarch's voice comes to us across all these ages, with its counsel so kindly and so sound.

For we may very fitly and profitably extend the counsel to a longer journey and a greater company. We are all "pilgrims on the earth," travelling on through this life with equal steps: and specially such as have the good hope through grace that they are

numbered in the Church of Christ's people, pardoned and renewed, specially confess themselves such, and "declare plainly that they seek a country." And surely, Christian friends, as we travel on towards the same Home, through like dangers and temptations, it becomes us to remember and act upon the kindly counsel of Joseph. And truly we need it: need the counsel, and God's grace to keep it, not to fall out by the way. We are sadly given, even Christian people, to quarrelling. I do not mean that decorous folk, making a Christian profession, are at all likely to use bodily violence to one another: or even to get to an outspoken interchange of hard words. Dealing blows, and calling names, are the rough means of rough people: our wordy fence is of a more refined character, though oftentimes words are intended to serve as poisoned arrows, and to leave a rankling sting. And such darts are often launched in the mildest tones, and with the most scrupulous courtesy of outward demeanour. It is hard to say what mark of the old unsanctified nature lingers longest in pardoned and regenerate Christian folk. A great living preacher has said that his experience has led him to think that the besetting sin, last uprooted from believing hearts, is untruthfulness: that no evil tendency seems able to live so long beside true grace, as the tendency to misrepresent an opponent;—and in stating his views to give them just the unhappy little twist in the direction of being very absurd, very wicked, or very unsound.

We have all known instances that look this way: but possibly the sin of uncharitableness lingers as long as any, and the evil impulse at many turnings, on many wretched little occasions, to "fall out by the way." There are good Christian people who are terribly touchy: very ready to take offence: very jealous of any lack of recognition of their own dignity and importance: very sore if their advice is not acted upon: very ready to throw difficulties in the way of even what they know to be a good work if it was undertaken without their being first consulted. There are Christian people who are very ready to get angry with those who differ from them in religion or in politics: Christian people who will renounce communion with a fellow-Christian because he thinks it right to kneel at prayer in church and to stand at praise, while they (most honestly) hold that these things are of the instigation of Satan. Then there are really good Christians who will always bear as hard as possible on a neighbour who has made some mistake;—who will not let such a one get easily out of his blunder, but subject him to the greatest possible humiliation ere they let him do so. The same people are very prompt to point out a neighbour's inconsistency: how at some time or other he thought on some subject or other differently from what he thinks now: as if every human being with a teachable mind were not of necessity the most inconsistent of creatures, and only he has a right to think alike year after year who

has nothing further that he can learn or know. Then there is that in human nature, even in the human nature of Christian people, which makes them apt to split off from one another into separate bands or armies, parted by deep gulfs of mutual misapprehension and dislike; and thus go on through the pilgrimage of life, through the wilderness of this world, fairly fallen out by the way, fallen out never to be reunited in this world, hating each other with no rational ground for the unchristian affection. We all know how political differences of opinion keep men apart who ought to be fast friends. We all know that, practically, social intercourse ceases between people who hold opposed views on questions of Church arrangement and government and support. As for thinking no evil of an opponent, happily one has sometimes seen *that* in a man of specially noble and cultivated mind: but as for anything like a general bearing of one another's burdens, as for in honour preferring one another, I do not know where in this world, unless in the descriptions and precepts of the New Testament, you will find much of *that*. As for the Catholic Church of Christ, I suppose no intelligent person will deny, that none of the social differences that exist between classes or individuals, founding on secular reasons, approach in virulence of hatred to the differences which part those who profess and call themselves Christians. It has grown into a commonplace now, a familiar household word, his bitter but

true statement who said that many Christians have not religion enough to love, but just religion enough to hate one another. Soldiers and servants of the same Prince of peace, pilgrims to the same Home, people who were to be known of all men for the disciples of their Lord in that they have love one towards another, surely, if you were very simple and very ignorant you would say that if anywhere, here you would have a united band. We have looked long enough at the fact: it is not a pleasant thing to look at: and we shall look another way. We have seen enough to make sure that we are not assuming too much when we take for granted that the counsel in the text is one which Christian pilgrims are not beyond the need of: and the remainder of our time shall be given to looking at certain reasons which enforce the counsel.

There is one, obvious, good, and strong: and like all good reasons, capable of being very shortly stated. You remember the appeal of Moses, when he saw two Hebrews striving in Egypt, long ago, and wished to make peace between them. "Ye are brethren:" that was all he said. He felt, and they felt, and you feel, that it was enough. For it was an appeal, and a direct one, to sympathies common to all men. There are some arguments which you would not think of presenting to a man unless you knew something about him: about his peculiar cast of mind and way of

thinking. I am afraid that some of us have occasionally been guilty in the way of suggesting to foolish people arguments which could have no force unless with a fool: while you would not have ventured to state such to any one possessed of tolerable penetration or even of common sense. And, apart from such extreme cases, you know that there are considerations which would tell with mighty force on a person of a particular training, a particular original constitution, a particular way of looking at things: while the same considerations might fail to produce the least impression on his next neighbour. But there are arguments that make their appeal to feelings which the man who has not is no man: and that of Moses is doubtless one of these. "Ye are brethren:" every one feels the rebuke to all variance that the simple words contain. Moses was right to stop when he had said them: though he had spoken for another hour, he could not have made his meaning clearer or more forcible. And I think that as he judged it best to be brief, when he presented such a consideration, so it is needless that much should be said now in enforcing this head of discourse. It is not necessary to argue at length that we should not fall out by the way, because Christian people are children of the same heavenly Father, and claim the same Blessed Saviour for the Elder Brother of all; and look for their rest at last in the same peaceful Home. And if it be a sad sight to see the estrangement of those who

said their first prayer at the same mother's knee, and spent the days of childhood by the same fireside; surely it is no less unnatural and mournful to see envyings, strifes, and every form of unchristian enmity, among those who trust they are born again of the same Holy Spirit's operation, and towards whom the same Redeemer has felt a common love. It ought not so to be. It argues, somewhere, a wretched disregard of what we all profess to believe.

A second reason why Christians on their pilgrimage should not "fall out by the way," is, that they are surrounded by enemies and dangers. So it is wise to preserve a united array.

We can trace the resemblance between the Church, and the train that in the stillness of the Eastern day, was wont to traverse the Eastern desert. Though our pilgrimage be not, as theirs, with the tinkling of drowsy bells, and the camel's soft step over the plain that stretches to the horizon, but in more commonplace scenes and ways,—as by dusty paths of toilsome duty, and painful trial; still we have that about our pilgrimage which matches the marauding Arab as on his swift steed he hung watchful on the rear of the company,—and the savage beast crouching close in his covert, to spring on the unwary lingerer as he passed near. We are pressed round by many powerful spiritual enemies: by a host of subtle and evil spirits, seeking to devour, to mislead: by innumerable peril-

ous influences from without and from within: and thus menaced by a common danger, even if we should chance to differ, it would not be safe for us (you would say) to fight out our quarrel now. We are, as it were, in the enemy's country: and prudence, to name no higher principle, would tell us to beware of opening our ranks: to avoid strife as we value our safety. The consideration is a telling one in things worldly. I can think that if you took even a band of men who had no very warm regard for one another, and set them to traverse by night some intricate tract of country, with thickets, raging water-courses, and deep marshes,—and told them that country was occupied by a great army of savage enemies, thirsting for their life,—I can think that such a band would be good friends if it were only for that night: that all differences would be left to be settled after they had got beyond their enemies' reach. A common danger has great virtue to unite: and that not merely for the time it lasts, but after it is over. You remember the old story of the three survivors of a desperate forlorn-hope: and how one of them ended his account, long afterwards, of that fearful time, by saying "And right dear friends were we for ever after."

Christian brethren, surely we have this reason for unity. Many unfriendly eyes mark our strifes: They give great occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. And the enemy takes the occasion. The bitter enmities, the groundless and deplorable schisms, in

the Church of Christ, form a stock commonplace on the lips of the enemies of our holy faith. The outer world, too, is always ready to set the stumbling or failure of any professed believer to the discredit of all. And such, in its essential nature, is all contention, that it is quite impossible to engage in it without throwing down some of the fences which guard us against our spiritual foes,—our ensnaring temptations. Angry and vindictive feeling: unfairness and untruthfulness: the arts of misrepresentation; and the arms of intimidation where that is possible: the eyes shut against light, whether from argument or information, —shut sometimes unconsciously, sometimes half-consciously, sometimes quite consciously: these are the kind of things that come of falling out by the way among Christians. I have looked on, carefully, at a good deal of religious controversy, both theological and ecclesiastical: and I can say sincerely, I never saw it conducted with candour: rarely with common honesty: not always with common decency. I am speaking, I ask you to observe, of the controversies of good Christian men. I have indeed seen fairness, honesty, temperate kindliness, in one of two contending Christians: Never in both: commonly in neither. For unfairness and bitterness on one side tend to gradually produce the like on the other. And I could, with the greatest possible facility, point out examples of the most rancorous malignity, and the most unsparing use of lying and slandering, on the

part of persons making a very loud profession of religion. Every one knows that the kind of publication which is with bitter irony called *a religious newspaper*, will, to put down an opponent, publish things more wicked and dishonest than any print would do, professing to be guided by no higher rules than those of common honour and decency. It is indeed to an unsophisticated mind very bewildering to find a man ending a tissue of rancorous and stupid slanders, by solemnly taking God to witness that in all these he has been actuated by a single eye to the glory of Christ. Now what woful proof is here that strife has opened the door of the heart for the entrance of a host of spiritual enemies: has involved in grievous condemnation those engaged in it; and done them unutterable harm! Ah, there is much that must be repented of, much that must be amended, before the eager controversialist will be in any degree meet for heaven. Just as strife, in the company of Joseph's brethren going through the desert, would have made them an easy prey to the prowling robber, so sure it is that to fall out by the way among Christians, is very likely to open the heart of each to the successful assaults of some of the worst foes of all.

There is one more reason which may fitly be mentioned, why Christian pilgrims, travelling heavenward, should remember Joseph's kindly advice. It is that by so doing, they will make their way so much pleasanter

and happier. We may be sure that if Jacob's sons had spent the hours of their journey in angry altercation, the journey could not have been a pleasant one. And when at last they got to their home, flushed with passion, dissatisfied each with himself, and looking grimly each on the others, they would have no pleasant remembrance of the way. The falling out by the way would be quite enough to utterly take away anything like enjoyableness from it. But every one knows how different it is to traverse any way in pleasant company and in kindly converse. How short the miles look: how cheerful the scene! Often as we may have walked that road, such things can make some one journey over it stand out memorably from all the rest. And if to "fall out by the way" has this power to embitter our earthly journeys; and if kindly and united converse has this power to smooth the roughest road and shorten the longest; surely it is so no less with the pilgrimage towards the Home above. It is not saying too much, to say that it is pleasant to be at peace with all around us; and painful to be at war with any. Even the firmest conviction that you are in the right in a quarrel, will not make it other than painful to be involved in one. I know, indeed, that in the case of some, whom charity would hope to be true pilgrims of the cross, this seems not to be so. There are those professing Christians who never seem to be content but when they are falling out by the way; to whom con-

troversy, and all that comes of it, seem to be the very breath of life: to whom it appears an absolute necessity of existence, to have some one to differ from,—and of course to vilify and misrepresent and accuse of heresy. But such men are the exception and not the rule: and till the tendencies of human nature are reversed, strife will be a thing to mar happiness and not make it. And most certain it is that the vital air of true religion lies not in the fevered atmosphere of debate, but rather in the milder region of counsels at one, of brotherly kindness and charity.

It causes suffering to ordinary people to be involved in strife. It is a dull, rankling pain. It has a cross-influence on all you do: and reading your Bible, and praying to God, it will often come across you with a sad sense of self-upbraiding. You will not be able entirely to acquit yourself of blame. You will feel that all this is not very consistent with your Christian profession: with your seasons at the communion-table: with your prayers for forgiveness as you hope to be forgiven: with the remembrance that in a little while you must lay down your weary head, and die. The man who has dealt another a stinging blow, in return for some injury: the man who has made an exceedingly clever and bitter retort in speech or writing; may feel a certain complacency, thinking how well he has done it, and what vexation he has caused a fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer: but he cannot be happy. He cannot know the real glow

of heart which you will feel, my friend, when God's Blessed Spirit has helped you with all your heart to do something kind and good to an offending brother. "Blessed are the peace-makers:" God has so made us that it must always be so: and while our nature, and the nature of all things, stays what it is, Unhappy must be the strife-makers. So, if you know any who are always trying to pick a quarrel with you: who are determined to fall out by the way, in spite of all you can do to keep the peace: be sorry for them: not angry with them, but heartily sorry for them. They may indeed cause you a little annoyance; but they cause themselves a thousand times more. The vexation they may give you, is but the feeble reflection of what they themselves have felt. God has so ordered it, as to make it inevitably sure, that the contentious, quarrelsome, envious spirit shall punish itself, most justly and most severely.

So we have looked at a sound advice we all need; and thought of a sin that doth very easily beset us. It is the sin of quarrelling: of splitting off from one another: of trumpery little irritations and coolnesses,—poor and contemptible in themselves; bad for our soul's health; and greatly abating the peace and joy we ought to know as Christian pilgrims. Looking at our many blessings, temporal and spiritual, I daresay we all sometimes think we ought to be making more of life; not merely in the

sense of turning it to better account, but in the sense of really enjoying it as we go on our pilgrimage way. And how much we might all help each other to do *that*, by mutual kindness: by bearing one another's burdens: by not being hard on each other's little failures in temper: by standing (if need be) a good deal from one whom we know to be a friend, and good in the main; by not being ready to take offence: by candour, kindly candour, in frankly telling a friend when we think we have cause of offence: by the utter blotting out of that most contemptible of all things,—I mean, without seeking or offering explanation, taking the pet, and drawing off in sulky silence. In a comparatively small community like this, surely all this is our special duty: and our peculiar temptation no doubt is to offend in all these ways. We see so much of each other, that doubtless the specks on the sun grow apparent: and if there be any one in this city who is not aware of his own faults, he may get what compensation he can from the assurance that these are exceedingly well known to all his friends. We have, most of us, taken the measure of one another: not, let it be hoped, in an unkindly way: yet we know the weakness, the folly, the little bursts of petulance or self-conceit: But we do not know what is being resisted, or what is being borne: *That* each knows for himself: and if we knew it all better, we should love each other better,—help each other more heartily,—bear

longer with one another. Now let us try to do these things harder than we have tried as yet: asking God's Spirit to help us. When we feel the temptation to uncharitable thought, or to that smart speech with is rarely charitable; let us struggle against it, and resolutely put it down, asking the Holy Ghost to strengthen us. He will help us, if He sees we are trying our best for ourselves: not otherwise. And so, even amid these present strifes, we shall anticipate something of the peace of that Better Country, where we are sure of this amid all our ignorance of it, that there is no quarrelling, no drawing off, no misapprehension nor falling out amid its holy and happy spirits. So shall He help us, that Spirit of all love and unity, as Christian men and women; as members of many families and households: as members of a Christian congregation: as members of the Catholic Church of Christ, one in Him amid all its sad divisions; to bear one another's burdens: to aid one another by kind words and deeds: to diffuse a kindly atmosphere of peace around us wherever we go: till we reach, through Him Who is the Giver of peace, that peaceful Home, where all anger and strife are done with for ever!

XVI.

THE UNSEEN GOD.

"Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself."—ISAIAH xlv. 15.

DO not be startled by these words: they tell us something which is the strain of many texts of Holy Scripture. Said our blessed Saviour to St Peter, as He washed the Apostles' feet, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." We read in Exodus these words: "Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was." Said the wise king Solomon, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." "Thy way," said the Psalmist, "is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." And St John puts side by side the truths of God's manifestation and God's invisibility: "No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." In another psalm we read "He made darkness His secret place: His pavilion round about Him were dark waters and thick clouds of the sky." Then St Paul writes of Almighty God as "dwelling in the light which no

man can approach unto: Whom no man hath seen, nor can see." And all these words sound like echoes of the great evangelical Prophet's: "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself."

As for us, we are the children of the light and of the day. The Sun of Righteousness hath arisen upon us, with healing in His wings. And therefore, we cannot understand nor imagine the utter darkness in which thoughtful, sinful, and sorrowful men lived in the ages and lands to which Revelation did not reach: the darkness not merely as concerned God, but as concerned all the things which it is vital for poor sinful creatures like us to know. What they themselves were, and whence they came: what was the world in which they were placed: what was their end, and what their Author: all was uncertain; and men did spiritually grope in the dark. And specially, when the wisest and best of Heathens, casting aside the vulgar belief in a great multitude of inferior gods, tried (in St Paul's expressive words) to "seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him;" oh how often a thought must have been present to their minds like that set forth in the Prophet's words that form my text!

But the light grew, age by age. God's message, His inspired Word, has told us many things which we could never have discovered for ourselves; and has shown us "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," "Who is the Image of the Invisible God." While

many wise men debated and wondered what God made man for, every child in this country that has gone to school knows that "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." And we know that "he who hath seen Christ hath seen the Father:" while we (as we humbly trust) have seen Him with the eye of faith;—have "looked unto Him," in looking to Whom is salvation;—have found Him Whom he that heartily seeks, finds. Is it not needless, then, in this time of gospel light, to take up the words of a former period, and to speak of a hidden God?

But is God not hidden? Is it not for want of some blazing manifestation, some crushing evidence that would annihilate doubt, that there are men, even now, who can stand forward in the presence of their fellow-sinners, and say, as men said too in the Psalmist's days, "There is no God!" In those days, they were fools that said so. But now, who does not know, they are men of science and of learning, thoughtful philosophers, and eloquent historians. And what a dreary, awful, soul-starving creed is theirs!

Is God not hidden? Is it not true that there are many people among ourselves, professing to be Christian people, who say they believe there is a God, and that God is the lawgiver and the judge of all, and that yet He "so loved the world as to send His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" and yet in whom this belief is a thing so faint and ineffectual,

that they go on thinking, talking, and living, just as if there were no God at all? If men realised Who it is that "besets them behind and before, and lays His hand upon them:" if they remembered Who is "the greatest Inhabitant of every place where men are living:" that there is One who reads their heart and life, and lays up in a memory that cannot forget every particular of what they think say and do, and all this to the end of one day calling them to a strict account; would they live as they do now? My friends, if we always remembered that God is beside us, and watching us, what a solemn difference would that remembrance make! For we do *not* always remember it, because God is so hidden from us. It is with us as it was with the patriarch Job: "Behold, we go forward, but He is not there: and backward, but we cannot perceive Him: On the left hand, where He doth work, but we cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that we cannot see Him!"

Now, surely it is right that we should think, for once, and for a little while, of a truth which you see has been so much in the experience of God's people, for thousands of years. It has been the desire of their hearts, to "see the King in His beauty:" yet, though Christ has said that "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," there stands the solemn declaration, "Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see God, and live." And you know what wonderful

virtue and efficacy the Apostle John ascribes to the Beatific Vision of the Redeemer in glory: nothing less than the making us like Himself. "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is." Things strike different people differently: and anything like mystical piety does not commonly commend itself to the minds of our countrymen: yet you know how inexpressibly dear to many earnest Christians *that* assurance has been. The last sermon ever preached by that great and good man Dr Arnold, whose noble and earnest spirit we may well venerate, while differing from many of his opinions, was from the text I have this moment repeated. And the last words he ever uttered from his pulpit were these, said with marked fervency,—"Yes, the mere contemplation of Christ shall transform us into His likeness."

"Now, we see through a glass, darkly: but then, face to face." Meanwhile, we are "present in the body, and absent from the Lord." Meanwhile we trust in a Saviour, "Whom, having not seen, we love." Let us think of certain senses in which we may still say to our Heavenly Father, even as we see His glory in the face of His Son our Redeemer, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself." And first, we may say that God is hidden, behind the veil of material nature.

This material universe is full of God's visible working: but it is the visible working of an invisible hand.

Of course, we all know that there is not a heart that beats, which God does not keep in motion: not a flower that blows, which He does not rear and tend: not a planet that circles, which He does not direct on its way. And yet, how silently the great system goes on! How thoroughly does nature conceal nature's God! "Lo, these are parts of His ways," said Job: "but how little a portion is heard of Him!" The work meets us at every turn: the Worker is never seen. Seasons revolve: and all the giant machine of the universe is in motion around us: but not a trace of Him who moves it all! We feel the heart beat, day after day: but we can discern nothing of the power that makes it do so. The earth, sustained by the unseen Hand, still seems to us, as it seemed to Job, to "hang upon nothing." No one ever saw the pencil that traces the delicate tint on the rose, nor the touch which gradually draws out the green leaves in spring. Now, all these things are the merest commonplaces: but, when we realise them, how solemn and awful! To think of the mighty agencies that are going on around us and within us, compassing us behind and before, sustaining each of us, and everything of which our senses tell us: and to think that the great Being who directs them all, though near us, though within us and around us, is never for a moment seen; but remains "the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible!" It would be an awful thing if there passed before our eyes now, in this house of prayer, a

flash of that light that once glowed on Sinai, and declared the presence of the living God on earth: but surely it is just as awful to remember, that God is certainly here now: that He is in the midst of us: that He is within these walls, protecting and sustaining each of us: and that yet He is withdrawn from our sight and sense as effectually as though He were not here at all! Unseen in that transparent atmosphere: inaudible in His coming and going to the sharpest ear, He is in this place, according to His promise. Oh let us worship reverently before Him, "as seeing Him Who is invisible!"

In the second place, we may say that God is hidden;—that His character and perfections are clouded to our view; by many things in the moral government of this world. Looking round on a great deal we see here, it is hard to feel that God is looking on at it all, and yet not interfering to set things right. And all that faith can say, in the sight of unutterable sin and misery, is this: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Faith says, "I know my God so well, that I will not be driven from my simple confidence in Him, even by a hundred sorrowful sights I see, in which I can discern no good at all." There are few days which a minister can spend in pastoral work in a large town parish or congregation, without seeing and hearing things in whose presence he must just say that.

For this is a world of trouble, and a world of sin. And human reason is quite incapable of understanding how there should be such things as sin and misery in the dominion of a God of infinite power and infinite love. It is best to confess *that* at once. I do not know how to reconcile the infinite goodness of God with the existence of the want and woe you may see even in the beautiful capital of Scotland, which almost break the philanthropist's heart. Still less do I know how to reconcile it with the awful disadvantage at which the poor little children of these frightful dens stand, as concerns the next world. What chance have they, God help them! Here, we can do no more than "believe where we cannot prove:" and say "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself!"

I am not going to dwell upon this subject: it can do no good. All I would say is, Read the history of the awful atrocities of the first French Revolution: Read the accounts which have lately been published of the hideous cruelties which are of everyday occurrence in the central tracts of Africa: Read any account of the Feudal System in Europe in the middle ages: Read any accurate account of the slave-trade, and of slavery as it used to be in America: and think whether you can show the reason why the Moral Governor of the world looks on in silence at things which we know must be unutterably hateful to Him. We have all read of things, and some of us may have known of things, that made us cry, "Why sleeps

the thunder!" Some day all this will be set right: but why should it ever be wrong? Reason cannot answer: Here Faith must be our support. Yes, and the simplest faith. Never was there truer wisdom than that of an old bed-ridden fisherman, who when his sick wife said she could not see the good of her illness to anybody; that the Lord's ways were hard ways for poor folk; replied that he had long since given up trying to find the reason and rights of things, but left the Lord to make all that straight: which, seeing a day was coming when we shall know even as we are known, he thought was but reasonable, and only wanted on our part some of that spirit which makes a man steer northward by the captain's orders, when his own mind is to bear due south. *There* is wisdom: we cannot get beyond *that*, in thinking of God's dealings with this world. All God's ways are kind and right, though we cannot see it now. And we trust Him. Still, it *is* dark. You remember the Psalmist, in his day of crushing distress. "I was dumb: I opened not my mouth: because Thou didst it!"

In the third place, we may think, in illustration of the text, of the singular fact in the constitution of our minds, that faith falls so vastly short of realisation. There is a great difference between believing a thing, and feeling it. We all believe that God "is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

But we do not realise this as substantially as we do these walls, and our neighbours near us. We all believe that God is here to-day: but how few of us feel that He is here as really as the person next us; and that every word now being said is actually falling upon His ear! Truly said the prophet, "Hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive."

If God were now, as in former days, to manifest Himself to our external senses, by flames kindled and voices uttered on another Sinai, we readily think that this would constrain us to feel His presence. No man would pass the day, from morning till evening, thinking of a thousand things, but God not in all his thoughts, if he had only to turn his eye to the horizon, and there was the blazing light to put him in mind. And yet, why should this visible representation affect us more than the firm belief we have in our mind and heart that God is, and is here?

It is easy to utter the name of God. It is easy to say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." But oh to realise the meaning of the words! Sometimes, indeed, the eye of faith appears to be preternaturally strengthened: the scales of sense fall off from it: and we feel something of what God is, what Eternity is, what Salvation is. In the silent night, far from means and ordinances: at the table of holy communion, remembering Christ and by faith feeding upon Him: clearer views dawn

upon the soul, now and then: clearer conceptions of the awful realities amid which it is living. But still, in the daily walks and duties of life, faith and realisation remain far apart. To believe a spiritual truth, and to actually feel it, are quite different things.

In these three senses, then, even in this gospel light, we may yet take up the great gospel prophet's words as to a hidden God. And you know how many human beings come to be practically "without God in the world." Looking round on others, and looking in upon our own souls, what cause for sorrow and repentance there is, in thinking how completely God is forgot by many: how often forgot by all! A stranger might think, that as God never leaves us, the thought of His presence would be always with us: and as in the company of some great human being our attention is not readily distracted to lesser persons and things, so it would be in His. But what is the fact? Do we always remember, wherever we are, that God is there? Do we live before him? Do we walk with Him? Do we set Him continually before us? Is it truly our great desire to be reconciled to Him by the blood of Christ; and to be filled with His Spirit? Is that the great end we are aiming at, day after day? Or do not worldly designs often take up all our care and labour? Do not we live many hours as if there were no God?

Now I know that we are all ready to think that this fact, that God is so hidden from us, sets us at a terrible disadvantage spiritually. We are ready to think that if God's presence were sensible,—if we could see Him,—it would keep us right: we should not sin, nor trifle, any more; we should earnestly set ourselves to the working out of our salvation, to the finding the Saviour, to the clothing of our sinful souls in that mantle of His imputed righteousness in which only we can enter without fear into the presence of God. We are ready to say to our Maker, in the largest sense of the words, "If I could see Thee, 'twould be well with me!" Why then is God hidden? And why are all spiritual truths so faintly discerned? For if we could but feel and realise the things we believe, it would be our salvation: We need to be told nothing new, but only to be made to feel what is meant by heaven and hell, by a sinful soul, by a Redeemer's sacrifice! And why is it that the organs of spiritual perception are so benumbed and ineffectual? why do they convey their message so dimly, like sound to deaf ears, like touch to the palsied hand? You know we always feel that we need food: but we do not feel in that distinct way that we need a saving interest in Christ, and that we need to be renewed by the Holy Spirit. You know we are always perfectly aware of the presence of the friend that sits beside us: why are we not as well aware of the presence of God?

Oh why do not sinners see more plainly the destruction they are going on to: surely *that* would compel them to come to Christ.

Our answer to all this is, that it is God's manifest purpose to make this world a place, in a certain sense, of trial. It is not indeed a place of trial in that sense that by our deservings here, we can merit heaven, and happiness there: No, in that meaning of the word man's trial ended, man's probation was finished, when Adam fell and we all fell in him: and all our salvation, all our hope, is through God's free grace in Christ. But this world is still a place of trial in this sense; that it is God's manifest purpose that it should be possible for us here to go right or to go wrong. We are to make our choice between life and death. "Come unto Me," says our Blessed Redeemer, as implying that in a true degree, it rests with ourselves whether we shall come or not. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved," said Paul and Silas: as implying that if we heartily desire to do *that*, the grace will not be lacking to enable us to do it. In short, candour, and common sense, enable us quite well to see that God's grace and Spirit, just like God's predestination of all things, leave man's free agency quite certain and real: and so leave this world a place of trial.

And this world *is* a place of trial just because of this: that it is possible for a sane man to go wrong.

There is enough, in God's Providence and God's Word, to show an honest soul that wants to do right, what to do: there is enough to make us feel we are poor sinners, needing a great Saviour and a great Sanctifier. But there is not so much as would drive a wicked worldly person to the Saviour, and to holy obedience, whether he would or not. And though to reject Christ, and go on towards perdition with open eyes, be the very height of madness and folly, still it is not insanity or idiocy in the ordinary sense: it does not stamp a man as unfit for the common work of life. As Dr Johnson said, Poor Christopher Smart the poet was put in an asylum because he used to fall on his knees in the streets and say his prayers: Now in solemn truth, the man that never prays at all, does a much more insane thing than the man who prays in the most unfitting circumstances: yet we shut up the one man and we do not shut up the other. It is God's purpose that it be left, in a certain sense, to our choice, whether we will go to Christ or hold away: and if He were to put on us a greater force than He has put already, by becoming visible, and by making His wrath visibly and instantly follow all sin, there would be no choice; and this world would cease to be a place of trial. It is an essential part of God's plan, in dealing with His creatures, to treat them as responsible, and as free. He puts us in a world which exerts a prejudicial influence over us: He tells us to go and fight with *that;* and tells us

how: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." He tells us that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him: but He does not so force Himself and His terrors upon our sight, by becoming visible to us, as to compel all men, by mere fear, to obey and worship: for thus doing He would destroy faith as well as unbelief; and would make obedience and disobedience equal. It would have been easy for the Almighty, by some awful manifestation in the instant of temptation, to have made sure that our first parents should not have committed that sin which brought death and woe into this world. But God, in His wisdom, would not do so. His responsible creatures shall be held responsible. They were able to stand, yet free to fall. And it is so still. God does not value extorted obedience: He does not keep us to the track, as you would a horse or mule, by the rein and the bit there is no resisting. "I will guide thee with mine eye," is His promise. He will guide those who look to Him for guidance with a docile heart: As for those who *will* go wrong, they may!

Now, we may humbly say, Here is the reason why God is so far hidden. He is revealed enough, in His gracious manifestation in His dear Son, by His Providence, His Word, His Spirit, to show us plainly that His will and our duty are that we go to Christ and seek in Him that salvation which he who heartily seeks, does in that seeking find; which in

God's account he hath, who is deeply convinced of his want of it. But He will not drive us as by mechanical constraint: He wants the obedience of intelligent, moral, free, responsible beings, not of machines. And so, though we cannot save ourselves, we have no right, in common cases, to expect to be saved in spite of ourselves. Such a thing, indeed, has been: but it is not to be counted on.

And so let us be sure of this, that the fact that we cannot see or realise God; and cannot feel the solid reality of the unseen world; and cannot feel the need of salvation as plainly as we do the want of food and raiment; is not an unfriendly influence which has come upon us without God's remarking it: He intends us to fight at this disadvantage. He designs to prove us by watching what we shall make of what we have. And we have quite enough, if we use it faithfully. The means of grace we have: the warnings that come to us from God's Providence, Word, and Spirit; are enough to put us without excuse, if we will not be saved: are enough to make this most certain, that if any here shall end in woe, it will be his own fault, and not God's. There was a man once, Christ Himself tells us, who thought that a little more, of warning, of testimony, might have saved himself, and might save his brethren. He prayed Abraham to send Lazarus from his rest, to testify to his five brethren, "lest they also come into this place of torment." But what was

Abraham's answer? "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them!" They have enough already, that is: let them give heed to *that!* And the rest of the story may perhaps make us think that we overvalue the good that would be done to careless and worldly people even by the sight of God. Perhaps it would make no great difference. Perhaps those who are godless now would be godless yet, even though God did not so hide Himself. For the rich man in woe answered to these words of Abraham, that if one went to his brethren from the dead, they would repent. But you know the reply: "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." And even so, they who refuse to close with the Saviour's invitations now, would not be drawn to Him by any manifestation of God. We shall never have stronger reason than we have to-day, for seeking the Saviour if we have not found Him yet, and for holding by Him if we have found Him already.

Let us earnestly pray, then, that God's Holy Spirit may make each of us feel, with a vividness beyond any result of mere argument, how weighty that reason is! May He, Who only can, not merely tell us about them, but CONVINCE US of our sin and misery! And thus making us feel that we are lost, may He lead us, daily, to Him who came to seek and save.

XVII.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

"And he brought them out, and said, Sirs, What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."—ACTS xvi. 30, 31.

IT is a bad sign of us, and a thing that shows we are not what we should be, if this text which has been read in your hearing does not seem to bring before us just the most important and interesting subject about which a minister can ever preach, or a congregation ever listen. It is a thing which shows how far we are from feeling as we ought, and from coming to God's house with the right purpose and for the right end; if a plain consideration of the momentous question which is proposed in the text, and of the plain direct answer which is there returned to it; will not fix our attention as ingenious speculation and brilliant imagery never did; and present itself before our minds, in its unadorned but stupendous import, with a personal bearing on our own individual and eternal state, that might stand for the most eloquent sermon that was ever preached, or for the best speech that was ever spoken.

This is an age of great questions: weary, weary questions. We have church questions: we have political questions: we have scientific questions: we have philosophical questions: we have literary questions: we have historical questions. And no one can complain that they are not discussed with sufficient ingenuity and sufficient keenness. But this question which is proposed in my text,—this question "What must I do to be saved?"—is one that to every man that breathes is of infinitely greater importance than all other questions put together. Other questions may affect our comfort and success in this world: other questions may affect the soundness of our views and the safeness of our principles of action, in matters relating to this passing life: but after all earthly cares are gone, and all earthly debates forgotten, —yea for ever and for ever,—it will concern us with a mighty force of concern, whether we gave this question that earnest consideration it deserves; and whether by God's grace we were enabled to find out and act out the right answer to it. And if all this be true,—and every one of you knows it is true,—what reason have we for thankfulness, that the answer to this question is so easy to discover, and so simple to understand! Who shall tell us, that God has not made His way of salvation plain enough and comprehensible enough? who shall tell us, that he has honestly sought the Bible through, and yet not been able to find the way to Heaven? What a contrast this, to the uncertainty

about questions that bear only on this present life! How men vex these, and debate them, and discuss them, for years and years; and yet get not one step nearer to an answer to them in which all parties will agree! Let an earnest inquirer, who honestly wants to get the truth, come to any great question in politics, or philosophy, or church government,—aye, or even the non-essentials of Christianity itself,—and he will find the keenest conflict of opinions,—the most contradictory views supported each by great names,—and no tribunal of appeal to which he can go in his perplexity, to get these wearying doubts dissipated, and to get at certainty and repose at last. But let that earnest inquirer come to the one question, of supreme moment, and intense personal concernment: let him be made to feel, by the teaching of the Blessed Spirit, that by nature all is amiss and astray, and that something must be done, or there remains only sinfulness and wretchedness: let him be brought to ask, as one who knows that he is asking about life and death, and that all other interests when compared with this are as dust and ashes, and that all other questions when compared with this are things not worth a rational man's wasting one thought on; let him be brought in this spirit to ask what it is that he must do to be at peace with God: and to his unspeakable gladness he finds, that this question meets an answer,—ready, as meant for those who have not one moment to lose; plain, as meant to be understood by all classes of

intellects, the humblest as the highest; direct, and explicit, and unmistakable, as given by one who would not mock the awakened spirit by rhetoric or metaphysic, when it comes in its agony to ask which way lies the escape from utter perdition. For when this earnest inquirer turns to the blessed volume of inspiration, he finds it recorded there, that one who felt what he now feels, coming to two of the first who preached the gospel of Jesus, asked them, with unutterable earnestness, the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" And as for them, they made no mystery of the matter: they told no round-about story: they answered the question as earnestly and directly as it was put to them. They said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

In discoursing from this text, I desire to go into no minute analysis of that sentiment or principle in the soul, or of that mental and spiritual act, which is meant by the injunction to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I desire, by God's help, just plainly and simply to sketch God's way of salvation through the Blessed Redeemer: remembering that saying of the great Reformer, that the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ is the article of a standing or a falling Church; and believing that any Christian organisation that does not teach that doctrine, as being, along with the doctrine of regeneration and sanctification by the

working of the Blessed Spirit, *the* great thing that it has to teach; is a thing that feeds thirsting souls with ashes, and that shall be swept away. And it is well sometimes, instead of taking it for granted in public discourses that the people to whom they are preached already know and believe and understand those great truths which are characteristic of our holy religion,—and thus preaching sermons which are rather *about* the gospel, than the very gospel itself,—it is well sometimes to go back to the very beginning,—to take up the very rudiments,—and to sketch out the way of salvation as plainly and earnestly as if speaking to people who never heard of it before. And who knows but that God may have brought to this church this afternoon, some one that really has never yet plainly understood what he must do to be saved, and that honestly wishes to be told? who can say but that it is ordained above, that this day shall witness his conversion to God? And who knows but this afternoon may have also brought here one, who thinks he stands right because he has taken up some wrong idea of the only ground on which man can be justified before his Maker? and it may be written that at this time he shall be made to see that Christ only is the Foundation approved by God, and that every structure of hope or trust that is built upon any other, must go down at last. Surely for the sake of such: surely, too, because the old story can never be told too often: you, Christian brethren, will listen willingly to that which already you

know so well; and which long ago came to your hearts with the irresistible demonstration of the Holy Spirit.

We can make out the first tendency of the soul when convinced of sin, in the question which the keeper of that prison at Philippi put to Paul and Silas: "What must *I do* to be saved?" When the soul is first made to feel that by nature and by its own innumerable sins it is lost and ruined, the first feeling is, Now *I must do* something to escape God's just wrath; and the first question is, What must *I do?* And thus in many cases the first resort of the awakened conscience is to external reformation of life; or to what have been called good works. The man makes an effort to cut off his besetting sins, and tries to amend his ways. Now, of course, this will not do. For even if the awakened sinner were able to make a perfect reformation both of heart and life, so far as concerns the present and future, this could not cancel past sins. *They* would still remain: unaffected by any after-amendment: *They* must be answered for. Would you think it reasonable that one who by some crime had become liable to the penalty that human laws inflict, should expect to escape from that, by promising to amend his life for the future? It is too plain that this first resort of the awakened sinner, this resort to good works, will not serve: and if the soul be indeed convinced of sin by God's Spirit, this plan will bring it no peace.

Then when this is deeply impressed on the mind; this truth, that reformation for the future, even if it were possible, would leave past sins unanswered for; then the soul of man takes a different course; a course not common now in this country, but well known in other places, and here in other times. It says, In addition to doing my very best to reform my conduct for the future, I shall inflict on myself the severest punishment for my past sins. I shall deny myself everything that human nature loves: I shall accumulate on myself everything that human nature fears, and loathes, and shrinks from. I shall abide in a cold cell, and live on the scantiest fare, and go barefoot and bareheaded in the bitter weather, and wear a hair-shirt, and sever myself from the society of all I care for upon earth, and scourge myself even to blood morning and evening, and go a weary pilgrimage to some distant place by dangerous ways: then surely, when I have made myself suffer so terribly in this world, God will never let me suffer in the other world too! Now, this is still the principle of self-righteousness and self-dependence: a man could have done all that although Christ had never died; and if doing that could save the soul, there was no need that Christ should die at all. This is still the What shall *I do?* and though it be a thing, in this form of it, so very natural to man, that it forms vital part not only of the perverted Christianity of Rome, but of the sad superstition which over vast

tracts of the East is accepted as a religious faith by millions and millions, it is a thing that is thoroughly false and wrong. It is not, for us men, God's way of salvation; and we must set it aside.

But this way of trying to make peace with God, you will say, is not known in this country; and why then speak of it? Well, let us not be so sure of that. Anything thoroughly congenial to human nature will insensibly steal in wherever there are human beings. Probably in two different ways, there is among us the tendency to vaguely believe in self-saving. One way in which it appears is when people give of their means to the support of missionary and philanthropic schemes, with some lurking notion that all this will stand to their credit at the day of judgment. And so it will: but not as merit: its value will be as an evidence of that saving faith from which all acceptable obedience springs, and every deed done without which is sin. Another way in which the principle that lies at the foundation of penance appears among us, is in the case of persons who have suffered very greatly: whose life has been one long disease; or who have met great trials by the loss of friends or fortune: and who have borne all this with much patience and resignation. Now, you do sometimes; every minister does oftentimes; hear such persons speaking in terms which, if they mean anything, mean that they cherish some ill-defined but deep-seated impression, that all this suffering endured in a present

life is something in the nature of satisfaction for their sins; and that since in this life they are called to suffer so much more than other people who are just as sinful, they surely cannot have to suffer in another life as well. Now brethren, I mention these two notions, common among Protestant Christians,—the work-of-merit notion, and the penance notion,—not to refute them: to us, with the New Testament in our hands, they need no refutation: but to caution you against them: because they steal into the mind so quietly, that you hardly know of their presence there, till on self-examination you find that they have so established themselves as to have been, unperceived by you, colouring all your ways of thinking on religion, and exerting an influence upon your conduct that startles you when you come to perceive its extent. And then there is a plausible way of stating a scheme of self-saving, or at least a scheme of salvation without any Saviour, which runs thus: Be sorry for the past: do all you can for the future: and leave all the rest to God. This looks plausible. For it is placing entire trust in God's goodness: and what more can you ask of a human being than just to do all he can? But then, though, rightly understood, it is impossible to trust God's goodness too much, yet *that* does not mean that God's justice and truth are blotted out: and His justice demands the punishment of sin; and His truth is pledged to the infliction of punishment. There is, indeed, blessed be His Name, a way in

which all these claims are reconciled: there is a higher law that comes in and cuts across the common law of the universe that ties suffering to transgression: we have all *that* in Christ's great Atonement: but we, knowing what we know, dare not hope for salvation through God's mere common goodness. *That* must ever be limited by His justice and truth. And then, the other plausible point in this notion as to the way to be saved,—the point, that surely man cannot be called to do more than just to do his very best,—this founds on perfect delusion. I know that it is an affecting thing to picture a poor human being meeting his Maker at judgment; and saying, I did my very best to please Thee and to make peace with Thee; and what could I do more? And doubtless, ignorant as we are, we can say that there have been those, favoured with no gospel-light, who may honestly urge that plea. Many a poor heathen, who testified to the terrible earnestness with which he reached after peace and pardon, by sufferings and efforts which we never knew, may find that though no human soul is saved but through Christ's great Sacrifice, it is not needful to your getting the good of that sublime Instrumentality, that you should know all about what you never had the chance to know. But it is different with us. From childhood we have known the way of salvation, through faith which is in Jesus Christ. There is neither reason nor humility in persisting in doing for ourselves what we are not

asked to do. It is not required of us to stand before God on the ground of our own doings. We need not turn that way. "Being justified by faith, we" can "have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." And we dare not alter by one jot or tittle the way of salvation God has revealed. We dare not bid you build on other foundation than He has laid. When you come to ask, as those escaping for your life, what you must do to be saved, there is but the one answer for you, and such as you. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"

And now, what is the exact thing meant by "believing on the Lord Jesus Christ?" It is matter of the most solemn concern that we fall into no mistake as to this.

Now, faith means, for one thing, the understanding's assent to evidence. To believe a truth on sufficient evidence, is to have faith in that truth. If then, you believe that there was such a person as Christ: if you believe the divinity of His mission and the reality of His miracles and efficacy of His work: if you believe, in short, speculatively,—that is to say, believe with your intellect, just as you do any other fact or truth, that Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to save sinners by enduring the penalty of transgression: this is, in a certain sense, to have faith in Jesus. This is, in a certain sense, to "believe on

the Lord Jesus Christ." But, brethren, if our faith be no more than this, we shall not be saved. The devils have as much faith as that. That faith, instead of saving, may aggravate the doom of such as have it. That faith may be a condemning faith.

And what then is saving faith? What did the Apostle mean, when he said so briefly to the Philippian jailer the memorable words? Well, it is plain St Paul thought the direction he was giving quite clear and comprehensible. He did not think that the unlettered jailer was the least likely to mistake his meaning. It is the fashion with some, we know, to describe saving faith in such an intricate and mysterious fashion, as tends greatly to perplex and bewilder the poor inquiring soul. They do so, no doubt, through fear that the mere speculative belief which I have just spoken of, should be mistaken for saving faith. I believe there is not the least danger of that. I believe that when one is once got fairly off the ground of his own doings and deservings as the cause of salvation; and when he is fairly brought to desire that he may believe in Christ and be saved; there is not the least risk of his fancying that a mere belief in the doctrine of the Atonement as a truth, is the faith that will save him. I believe that man's own common sense would revolt at any such notion: and I have greater confidence in God's guiding Spirit than to suffer myself to think that when He has once from the heart taught a man to renounce

self, He will let him fall into any important error as to what is meant by faith. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sense that brings salvation, includes all that speculative belief we have spoken of; and a great deal more. It implies that you put your trust in Him for salvation. It implies that you are deeply convinced of sin: that you discover no method of escape but through a crucified Saviour; and that you go with your load of guilt and anguish, and cast yourself down at His feet. It implies that you renounce all self-dependence: that you abandon every earthly stay; and fly to Jesus as your only stay. It implies that you place your entire reliance on His atoning blood and His spotless righteousness: that you unreservedly surrender your soul, with its immortal interests, into His hands; and that believing all His promises, and striving to obey His commands, you look forward, through Him alone, to eternal happiness. *That* is saving faith. *That* is what Paul and Silas meant when they bade the jailer believe. *That* is God's way of salvation. Simple as it looks, we cannot do it by ourselves. We need God's Spirit to enable us to believe. But there is no hardship in that. For it is perfectly certain we shall get that Blessed Spirit if we do but sincerely and earnestly ask.

Such is saving faith. You see that I have explained its nature very shortly indeed. That is what I intended, and wished, to do. I believe

there is nothing which tends so much to bewilder and discourage an anxious awakened soul, as anything like going into the metaphysics of faith: trying to define the respective provinces of head and heart in it, and the like. I should have regretted, and I should have blamed myself much, if I thought that in speaking to-day to dying men about the most important thing concerning which it is possible to speak to them, I had spoken otherwise than in the very plainest words I could find. I should wish that if there be one here, who up to this day really never knew what was meant by saving faith in Jesus,—I should wish that such a one may carry away with him a clear idea: and may be well assured that God has set out no way of salvation that is so misty and perplexed, that not one man in a hundred, of plain people, could plainly tell you what it means. I cannot but think that many otherwise good religious books are not free from great blame, for the long, involved, mystic descriptions which they give of faith. Think, When you are telling of the remedy to the fast-dying man, is not the shortest and clearest way the best? The Apostles, you see, thought the briefest way of answering the awakened sinner, the right way. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ:" that was all. To every inquiring soul let the same be said: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and pray for the Holy Spirit to help you so to believe. And oh, inquiring soul, if even yet, though you ear-

nestly desire to do so, you do not clearly understand what is meant by saving faith; just go and tell God that. Tell God that: and He will make it plain.

Now, does it come across the mind of any one here, that all this is too easy? Does it seem too cheap a way of escaping the punishment due to perhaps a whole life of sin, just to repent towards God and to believe on Christ? Perhaps that has crossed your mind. It has occurred, we know, to multitudes of other people. And, perplexed by the freeness of the gospel salvation; feeling as if it ought to be more difficult to be saved; they have devised penances here, and expiatory suffering for a time in the other world. But we can say no more, than that the way of salvation of which we have thought at this time, is God's way. It is plainly set out in God's Word. If this be not true, we cannot be sure that anything taught there is true. The gospel salvation is offered without price. It is a free salvation: it was bought with Christ's doing and suffering alone. Yet surely it can only be if our eyes are without spiritual discernment, that the conditions needful on our part will seem light. Repentance and faith, though the unseen exertion of the invisible soul, make a great work after all. It is not a little thing to go through, truly to repent. And the natural temporal consequences of sin are not escaped by believing on Christ. In all ordinary cases, they will come. And

no one half so readily as the penitent sinner himself will confess that they come justly. There can be no greater delusion than to fancy that the gospel salvation, with all its freeness, tends to make sin a light or small matter. Ignorant of the very alphabet of the gospel the soul must be that fancies *that!*

And does it cross your mind too, that if all that has been said be right, then you have just to believe: and afterwards you may go away and do what you like, sin just as you like; and even if you have not been forgiven for everything once for all, you know where the Fountain is always ready to wash you clean,—or to clear you at least from the risk of damnation? Well, some have thought that too; and acted upon the belief. But trust me when I say that no heathen, no devil, was ever more decidedly outside the kingdom of God, than these! For if you have truly believed on Christ, one thing will follow certainly: There is not time, to-day, to explain how it follows, but it does follow; that in all your life, every moment of it, you will set yourself to avoid sin as you never did before. No conviction that sin brings damnation, can make you half so zealous to shun it, as the sight of it gained by believing on Christ: the sight of it as inexpressibly evil in itself, as unutterably ungrateful to God, as the cause of unutterable agony to your Saviour. Once have the good hope through grace that your sins are forgiven: and it will become your work and prayer

to be clear of sin in heart and life. You will shun it, not because you are afraid it will bring you to hell; but because your whole renewed and sanctified nature will by necessity constrain you so to do.

XVIII.

THE WAY TO ZION.

"They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward."—JER. l. 5.

THEY point us, the words of this prophecy, to two great events: one of them past and gone; the other yet to be. Looking onward, from that long-departed day on which this text was first written, the prophet's eye, no doubt, rested first on the destruction of that Babylon which was "the glory of the Chaldee's excellency," and the return from captivity of the exiled Jews. But, even as he looked upon a prospect which to the patriotic Jew must have been a bright one, he saw, looming far away in the depth of future ages, another, brighter by far: and before the ink had dried upon the page whereon the Holy Spirit was writing by his hand some part of the future history of the world, the prophet must have been aware that there was further meaning in the words he was tracing; and that their sense was not exhausted when you thought only of this first return of the captive Jews to their native land. For

the prophecy seems to apply no less to the downfall of a Babylon that had yet to be founded and to flourish; that mystic Babylon which in following ages should exalt itself against the Lord: and to that restoration of Abraham's scattered children to the land of promise, which shall come when the consummation of all things is at hand. I need not say to such as know something of the prophecies of Scripture, that it is no unusual thing for them to bear this double sense, and to point to the like twofold fulfilment: nor is it necessary to do more than remind you that it not unfrequently happens that a prophecy may contain a statement of circumstances which will be no more than partially fulfilled in the first event to which it refers; and which must wait its full completion in the second.

And thus it is that we, living now, live in an age which lies between the two events to each of which the prophecy in the text refers. Once already has the world been startled by the crowds of weeping yet joyful wanderers, who, with their faces turned towards Zion, asked for direction on the way. Once have the paths that led from Babylon towards Jerusalem been thronged by eager multitudes, hastening from slavery and exile to freedom and home. The feet are dust that have trodden those ways already; and the voices are hushed, with the hush of ages, whose utterances first made the prophet's words come true. But the day is yet to come, when, stirred by one impulse, the

innumerable families of the scattered Jews shall arise from their places of sojourn in every land and among every race. Looking at last on Him Whom they pierced; mourning at last in heart-felt penitence over their rejection of Him Who died for them; we seem to see them setting out, in many companies, winding along many different ways, yet all converging towards Jerusalem as streams meet in the ocean: and fearful lest they should mistake their way, anxious not to waste a step, they ask earnestly of those they meet, as to the path which is the right one. "They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward."

But I purpose, in this discourse, to regard the text, neither in its relation to that return of the Jews which is past, nor in its relation to that other which is yet to come. In all their history, the Jews were a people whose lot illustrates and typifies the history of the Christian Church, and of individual members of it: and I am about to apply the text, as it may well be applied, to the case of Christian pilgrims, escaping from bondage worse than Egyptian or Babylonian, towards the better Jerusalem above. I believe that we may find much instruction in the text, looked at in this way. And I believe, too, that we shall find it is fulfilled most strikingly, in the history of all true believers.

Now, the thing to which I wish specially to direct your attention in discoursing from the text, is that suggested by the latter words of it. "They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward:" Mark

these closing words. They shall not merely ask the way: not merely ask for direction in the road that leads to Heaven: there is something more peculiar in what they do: They ask the way, but they ask it "with their faces thitherward." And there are three different thoughts which these words suggest, to each of which I desire to direct your thoughts.

The most obvious thought suggested, is this: that there seems something like a contradiction between the two parts of the text. They ask the way, these people; but they ask it with their faces Zionward: It seems as though implied that they ask their way when they know it already, and when therefore they do not need to ask it. And so in the Christian life too: there seems in it one great point of difference from the ordinary way of the world. We all know that in this world's common business, seeking implies that the thing sought yet remains to be found: once the thing is found, the search is ended. The man sought diligently,—hunted up and down through the wilderness,—till he found his lost sheep: but once it was found, he laid it on his shoulders and bore it home, and sought for it no more. The woman lighted her candle and swept the house, and sought diligently till she found her lost piece of money: but once it was found, she gathered her neighbours to rejoice with her, and sought for it no more. But it should seem that as the Jew followed his path to the

earthly Canaan, and as the believer follows his to the Canaan above, there may be such a thing as seeking, after finding. "They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward:" They shall inquire diligently as to the way, though they are treading it right, and though they have been treading it long: For so fearful would they be lest they should deviate by ever so little from the true road, that at every turning they would be anxious to make sure that the turn they had taken was the right one: and wherever the road parted into two ways, one to right and one to left, even though nearly sure that the one to the right was the way to Zion, they would make assurance doubly sure: they would make quite positive that it should never happen at any future time that they should find themselves miles out of the right track,—and should have to say to themselves, Well, if we had just thought of asking the way at such a turn where we were not quite sure of it, we should have been saved many a weary foot, and many a useless one. And not only so. Not only would the Jew, journeying towards Zion, wish to cut off the faintest chance of straying from the path, by asking twenty times when it was needless, rather than miss one time when it was necessary: but another reason would come in with gentle weight, to prompt such questioning as that. For not only would his elated heart constrain him, to reveal his joyful errand to all who met him: not only would he weary to let all men know how

hopeful and thankful he was: Not only *that;* but so pleasantly would fall upon the ear the direction to the Golden City, that he would like to hear it repeated, even after he could do without it. We like to speak, till we grow sophisticated by hard experience, even to strangers, of things uppermost in our own hearts: we like to speak of them, though we have spoken of them a hundred times before: and the Israelite would listen, as to a strain of music the dearer because it was old, the better loved because it was remembered so well and because it had been heard so often,—to the story of whereaway it lay, his own true Home; the beautiful city where his fathers had lived and lay sleeping.

So with the Christian pilgrim: even so. The prophecy is fulfilled in his case too, that he should ask the way to Zion, with his face thitherward. Though he know the heavenward way, he likes to hear more of it: likes to hear more of it, in order that he may make doubly sure he is not straying from it: likes to hear more of it, just because any mention of it is a pleasant thing. No matter how advanced a Christian may be in the divine life, he never gets beyond being interested in the earliest and most fundamental truths and doctrines. He is just as delighted to hear the old "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," as if he had never heard it before. Give us the old story, every day! *That* counsel he never seems to get

beyond the need of: *that* counsel he can never hear too often. Why, we have before our eyes a daily proof that the Christian can still go on seeking though he have already found. What do you come to church to hear preached? Just the gospel. Just the old story: an old story, though ever Good News. You know before you come here, the sum of all the preacher can say to you. Come to the Saviour: Trust Him, and obey Him; is the sum of the message to the most advanced as well as to the youngest believer. And the message is as appropriate in the one case as in the other. Those among you who for many a day have faithfully walked the way of life, can yet listen with pleasure to the voice that tells you where it lies; and bear patiently with the friend who would point out to you the path which you know perhaps better than he does.

Perhaps we have all sometimes fancied, that it is almost needless for a confirmed and established Christian to come to church week by week: needless, in any case, that he should listen to the sermon. Why, we might say, he is only hearing what he already knows: listening to reasons why he should do what he has already done. The difficulty is theoretical: it vanishes in practice. It is just the most advanced in the life of faith: just one who has been the means of bringing many to the Saviour; that we have seen listen with the liveliest interest to plain truth, known well, and known long. O

brethren, it is not merely the dry presentment of information, when you speak of the heavenward way to the human being who owns himself a pilgrim on the earth. It is not simply the conveying to him of a piece of information, which it may be very proper, or even very necessary, for him to possess. It is rather as if you sat down by the exile's side, and talked to him in sympathising tones of the ways that lead to his never-forgotten home: it is rather as though you kindly conversed with one parted for long years from all he loves, of the dear faces, aging now, that used to surround the far-away fireside, and of the pleasant voices perhaps to be heard no more. It is not that your words convey any new knowledge that was not previously possessed that makes them be listened to with such delighted interest. It is just that the subject you speak of is so pleasant, that the exile would talk about it all day long.

The second thought suggested by the prophecy that the Christian pilgrim should ask the way to Zion with his face thitherward, is this: That the peculiar manner in which he asks the question is strong proof of his sincerity in asking it: strong proof that he really means to follow the path which he asks you to point out to him: because it shows he is making all the use he can of the information he has got already.

We might imagine such a thing as a man asking the

way to Zion, with no real wish to set forth on that way. We might imagine such a thing as a man's conscience refusing to give him rest, unless he should see to it which way lies the road to Heaven: while at the same time in his heart he would be very pleased if he could just manage so that he might have it in his power to say, Well, I really tried my best to find out the way to Heaven;—I really sought the way to Zion, but I could not find it: and so of course I am not to blame if I do not follow it. But in the case of a person who asked the way to Zion in that spirit, we should not look to find him asking it "with his face thitherward." The fact, of asking the way, but asking it with the face Zionward, would be proof that though the man wanted more information as to his way, he was yet making the best of the information he had already: and although he might wish to find a shorter way, an easier way, a pleasanter way, he was yet pushing on steadily in that way which his present knowledge pointed out as one at all events in the direction of Zion; which was one way to Zion, if not *the* way,—that is, the best way. Now, if you found a man seeking earnestly for more instruction as to his way, but at the same time making the best of what he knows; you would say *that* man really wanted to get to the place he was asking the way to. But if you find one asking his way towards any place, and at the same time sitting still and doing nothing: or if you find him walking stoutly on in a direction

he knows is not the way, and which you have ground to suspect he has a strong impression is just the opposite of the way; you would not believe *that* man honestly wanted to reach the place he talked of. You would judge that for some reason which he knew best himself, he wished to appear anxious to go in one direction, while his inclination and his heart were running in a very different one. But see the bearing on the question of his true intention, of the description of the Christian pilgrim in the text. He does not ask his way, and turn his back upon the place. He asks the way to Zion, as you meet him on his road. He is in some perplexity: Just here there are two paths to choose between: he may go to left or right: but when you look at him, you see *that* about him which makes you feel he asks in good faith: his face is in the right direction: you are well assured that he does not want to get credit for the will to take the difficult way which is right, yet to have the pleasure of taking the easy way which is wrong. Now, consider: Is there not among professing Christians too much of this last: of asking the way to Zion, with a face that looks another way, wishfully? It has already been said, that by coming to church on the Lord's day, we do as it were ask the way to Zion: Every time we open our Bibles we ask the way to Zion: for it is asking the way to Heaven to ask what is the right thing for us to do in the next little worldly business: and each time we go of our

own act and listen to the preached gospel, we are inquiring what we must do to be saved. But is it not true that many of those who ask that great question, have no firm purpose of acting upon the answer they get to it? They ask it merely for form's sake, and to make a decent appearance: They do not honestly want to follow the path they ask for: They ask the way to Heaven, but they ask it with their faces turned towards the world, and their hearts looking thitherwards too. And what wonder, then, if all their inquiries lead to no practical result, when in truth they know they did not wish they should? A great many of the hearers in a great many churches, when they hear the text read, and prepare to listen to the sermon, have not the least intention that their life, for the next week, shall be guided by the counsels the sermon is to contain. I know, of course, that to take one step in the road towards Heaven, is what the unconverted man of himself cannot do: A power from above must be given him before he can do *that:* But there is one thing he can do: he can at all events turn his face thitherward; and so give proof that he honestly desires the power to turn his steps. Every unconverted person knows that though he be not able independently to work out his own salvation, there are yet certain things which he ought to do to put himself in salvation's way: and to do these is as it were that turning of the face in the direction of Zion, which vouches for the

sincerity, the earnestness, of the question as to the path that leads there.

You profess, my hearers, by your weekly appearance here, if by nothing else you say or do,—that you wish for guidance in the way of salvation: You ask the way to Zion. Do you ask it with your faces thitherward? Do you honestly try to follow the path that is pointed out to you? You are told to come to Christ, and believe on Him: Now do you earnestly seek, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to do that? You are told to mortify and subdue the sinfulness that dwells in you: Now do you allow unkind, unjust, impure thoughts and affections to readily enter into your heart? You are counselled to set your affection on things above: do you go away home, and from Monday morning till Saturday night suffer your whole thoughts to run upon this world? You are counselled to pray always, to pray everywhere: Do you set yourself, with real intention, so to do? Because if you do not give proof of the sincerity with which you seek for direction in the way to Zion, by following out the direction you receive to the very utmost of your power: If you come and ask the way to Heaven, and then turn your face in what you know is just the opposite direction: you are showing that your appearance here is no more than a compliance with the general custom; and that your asking the way to Zion is a mere hollow pretence. Turn your face thither; and

then we shall believe you are in earnest when you ask the way. But do not, like so many, dishearten the preacher by practically asking him a question, to whose answer you hardly listen, and for whose answer you do not care.

The third thought suggested by these words to which we have so often referred, which describe the Christian pilgrim as asking the way to Zion with his face thitherward, is this: that the believer, in advancing on his heavenward course, is rather attracted by the hope of heaven, than driven by the fear of perdition. He is travelling towards Zion; and his view is bent steadfastly upon the distant towers of that glorious city. His face is thitherward: *that* is the prospect that fills his eye: He does not walk towards heaven as it were backwards, with his face turned towards the destruction he is escaping from, and his mind quite occupied by that, and the dread of that the great motive that prompts him to exertion and that speeds him on his way. No: it seems as though it were gently implied, yet decidedly, in my text, that the Christian's motive is before him and not behind: that it is hope and love rather than horror or fear: that the thought uppermost in his mind, day by day, as he goes on through this wilderness, is not that of the outer darkness, the worm that never dies, the fire that is never quenched,—but rather of the bright and peaceful home where are his treasure and his heart:

and that He thinks of God Almighty not as the angry Judge and the inflexible Punisher, but rather as the God and Father of our kind and gracious Saviour, Whose Name is Love. Far be it from me to say that the dread of future woe is not a motive which ought to tell powerfully and awakeningly upon the heart of every man: I know it is a motive strongly urged in Scripture; and never urged more solemnly than by our Blessed Saviour Himself: Never was preacher that spoke more plainly of the wrath to come, than the kind compassionate Redeemer: I know that the first attempts to awaken the sleeping soul and startle the careless sinner, must generally be by an appeal to his fears. But though that may serve for the first awakening: though that may be the first thing that will bring the unconverted man to think of his state: still it is when the love of the Saviour is in some degree understood, that the soul heartily goes to Him, drawn by the cords of love, the bands of a man. And as the believer day by day journeys towards his Father's house above: as, forgetting those things which are behind, he reaches forth unto those things which are before: as, leaving the principles of the gospel of Christ, he goes on unto perfection: surely it is not with the shuddering terror of one who hears behind him the roaring of the flames of Sodom, but rather with the onward bent of one hastening towards the dear fireside at home. He speeds on the way to Zion, and his face is thitherward: there is not one

hasty startled look behind him, not one hurried glance backwards on that ruin from which he feels that through Christ he is safe for ever: But it is all earnest onlooking: striving forward because of what lies before; reaching forth, if not always for glory honour and immortality, at least for rest, for safety, for freedom from sin. I make bold to say, that in the best Christian people I have ever known, the fear of hell was no appreciable motive at all: It did not weigh with them a feather! The love of Christ constrained them: the hope of glory, and all *that* means which means everything, effectually drew them on. They feared sin, because it is ungrateful and evil: not because they were afraid it would be their ruin: they knew it could never be *that*. It was with them as Jeremiah said: They journeyed on the way to Zion, "with their faces thitherward."

Everybody can understand that there are motives which draw, and motives which drive: and that very opposite motives may make one do the same thing. You have read of the man in a northern country, going home from the town one evening: driving his sledge, under the keen starlight, along the rude track across the waste: and suddenly hearing the distant howling that showed a band of wolves were on his track. You have read of the desperate speed with which he hurried on, as the cry behind him, always louder and louder, showed that the savage beasts were

gaining on him; and how at last he reached a place of safety just as the gaunt forms and fierce eyes came in sight close behind him. Now, that man was going home: and he got home safe, too; but it would always be a terrible remembrance, that awful journey. But, think of him going homewards, on a pleasant summer day, after a time of absence; drawn only by the strong desire to see again the old familiar faces, so very dear: drawn by the home before, not driven by wild beasts behind him: He might not, indeed, press on with the same frantic effort, inspired by the bare instinct of self-preservation: but surely with purpose as earnest, and with as little thought of turning back. And how much happier the journey of the traveller this way drawn, than that way driven! Surely, Christian friends, it is not wrong that we should wish, and humbly ask, that going on, every day (as we trust), to the Home where Christ is, we be effectually drawn by the good hope through grace. We will forget the things that are behind: We will reach forth unto those that are before. Wearied, we look on for rest. Perplexed, for full light. Anxious, for perfect peace. Sinful, for the pure heart. Sorrowful, for everlasting joy. Absent from our Saviour, to see His Blessed Face.

XIX.

THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT SOBERLY WEIGHED.

"I would not live alway."—Job vii. 16.

IT was the Devil that said it, "All that a man hath he will give for his life:" but the father of lies for once said what has a strong likeness to truth. In the great majority of cases, men cling to this pleasing anxious being, with its human interest: with its tried, familiar joys and woes: and they shrink, with an instinctive horror, from that relentless messenger who parts them from all they have seen and felt, and launches the unclothed spirit upon an untried existence and unknown scenes. If the merely worldly man sometimes repines at the ills that flesh is heir to, —sometimes feels as though he could willingly creep into a quiet grave, and give up the wearisome round of life,—he yet cannot but apprehend that elsewhere there may be something infinitely worse. And the ordinary Christian even, who has a blessed hope beyond the grave, cannot but feel, especially in his

less cheerful moments, that the valley he must traverse is dark, and the Jordan he must cross is deep: that after all is said, it remains a very serious thing to die.

Yet, strong as is the natural leaning to life, and just this life, many a human being has been able to tear himself away from it. Mere satiety, and weariness of everything, have nerved to quit it by one desperate leap. Some, like the afflicted patriarch whose words form my text, have felt the love of life die out, under the bitter pressure of pain, and the desolation of bereavement. Some, yet more wretched, urged by the stings of guilt that could not be forgot, dogged by unendurable recollection, and met in the face everywhere by black despair, have rushed madly from this place of their misery and sin; as with the wish in their heart, as with the cry on their lips, Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world!

It is, I firmly believe, not merely charitable but just, to believe that such as pass from this life by their own act, must have been so maddened by misery as to be in no measure responsible; and so to hold them as not the guiltiest but the most unhappy of our poor sinful race.* As for the wish, hasty, impatient, not

* The writer has had several opportunities of remarking how much harm is done by an intemperate and unreasonable fashion of speaking on this sorrowful subject. He has found that needless pain is given to survivors among the humble class in Scotland, by a foolish passage on the matter in Blair's *Grave*.

quite sincere, that sometimes breaks forth from great sufferers, saying like the fainting Elijah, "It is better for me to die than to live,"—*that* deserves just the condemnation due to all wishes that are hasty, impatient, presumptuous, and not quite sincere. But it is something quite different from *that*, that breathes through the memorable words, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." There is nothing but what a humble Christian might utter to-day, though our Saviour were present to hear him, in these words of Job, uttered not in impatient despair, but in firm faith and simple submission. They are but the expression of the creature's acquiescence in what he knows to be the Creator's will. And only by God's grace can we, whose hearts so readily cleave to the dust, turn heartily and without regret from the seen to the unseen. We cannot say but what we are needed here a while: Most of us feel that there are those who could not well do without us: And for their sakes, no doubt, to most, this life is dear. But if we had to think only of ourselves, "This is not our rest." Soberly, and calmly, we would not live alway. There is something other, something better, needed. By the make of our being, we never shall be right, till the restless heart rests in the presence of the Blessed Redeemer. There are things to go through before *that* can be: things from which human nature shrinks: but it is well worth while. For through the gate of death, we pass into the life immortal.

Let us try, by God's help, soberly to look into this matter; and weigh the reasons which go to prove that Heaven is better than earth; and so that the believer should not wish to live always here. The reasons are plain, and good: May the blessed Spirit bring them home to us! There is no fear at all that they will impress us too much.

Think, first, of the unsatisfactoriness of this life, and of its many sorrows and cares. We shall not say so much of the unsatisfactoriness: because no one will quite take that in, unless through a rare experience like that of Solomon, and of other very great and rich folk, who learned the vanity of this life by being allowed to get all it could yield them,—and then finding that it would not do. But we all know how much pain, anxiety, disappointment, bereavement, there are in this life,—even in the life of the best Christian. All things, we know, work together for good to those who love God: but this does not imply that the Christian shall not bear his part in the ills that flesh is heir to. All things work together for his ultimate good, not necessarily for his immediate happiness: and it may be that the darkest days of his life are those which see him make the greatest advance in his journey towards Heaven. You know that shade and sunshine, storm and calm, day and night, summer and winter, all do their part to root and strengthen some great tree on which their successive influences

are brought to bear: and so with the various influences under which the Christian's character ripens for the better world. It is his great blessing to advance through life with a soul which God has so gifted, that it will extract good from the whole of what happens to it. Nothing can ever do the believer real ill: everything that befals him is co-operating with everything else for his best good: but then, many of these things may be very dark and painful at the time,—like the drear December night to the tree battling with its storms. I have heard it said, as though in reproach, that the real reason why we are all sometimes so anxious as we look on to the future, is, that we cannot trust God; cannot leave ourselves implicitly in His hands, sure that He will order all things well. But surely this is not stating the case fairly. If we have given ourselves to our Saviour's charge, we have no doubt at all that God will order all things for our true good: but the doubt and fear come in, that He may judge some things to be for our true good which will be terribly painful, terribly mortifying and humbling, yea, utterly heart-breaking: and the very thing that weighs sometimes upon us heavily, is just that we can so thoroughly trust God to send us what is good for us, truly good for us, however sore the discipline may be. It gives you no assurance at all that your worldly lot shall be a prosperous and happy one, to be assured that it is all ordered by your Saviour, and ordered in kindness and wisdom. For perhaps,

God only knows,—perhaps He may see that you need the discipline of much tribulation: and if sorrow be needful to you, then, if God loves you, sorrow will be sent. Now, precious discipline as sorrow is, it never can be pleasant. And though (by God's grace) resigned, humble, and thankful under it, it will be a glad thing to be done with it for ever. But not on this side of time can that be! Not the best believer, though beloved of God, can be sure of freedom from a host of lesser and greater troubles, here. It is not here that the sorrowful lines shall be smoothed out from the face, nor the anxious look taken from the eyes. Wherefore we say, with the patient patriarch, what he says in this text. I do not know if the day will ever come to us, when, with healthful and composed spirit, we shall say, Now, this is the time to go: though but the other day I heard it said, calmly and devoutly, and in simple submission to God's will. But in this hour, composedly looking onward, to a peaceful and happy Heaven, we say it, We "would not live alway."

A second trouble, beyond that of sorrow, which will never be done with in this life, comes of sin within us and around us: of the warfare of the flesh against the spirit: of remaining corruption, never entirely mortified. And here is not merely a trouble, in the sense of something that causes suffering,—but likewise in the sense of that which causes great

danger, great spiritual danger. I am sure we have all felt, all who have lost those very dear, even in the great bitterness of fresh bereavement, what a grand thing is a completed life: fairly completed in the odour of sanctity, and in the good hope through grace: and now beyond all possibility of failure and disappointment, of sin or shame. We are not safe, till we are in Heaven. Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall. Oh the sorrowful wrecks there have been! Think of St Paul, after he had preached to others, after all he had done and suffered for his Master, fearing lest he should be a cast-away! Wherefore, let our resolution be like his: to mortify the flesh with the affections and lusts: to keep under the evil nature and bring it into subjection. There is nothing more certain than this: that though when in our right mind, and in our best state of feeling, we see plainly that the ways of godliness and purity and truth are those of pleasantness and peace; yet times come when we cease to be our true selves,—or in any case our better selves: Times come when sinful tendencies gather strength, and push us from the right way: when we find within ourselves a foolishness, a self-conceit, a wickedness, which we thought we had been done with,—but which we discover with shame are yet unmortified and unsubdued. We discover that it will not do to discern, with whatever degree of shame, that once we were very foolish and very bad and showed ourselves so: God humbles our pride yet

deeper in the dust by making us feel in bitterness that we are very foolish and very bad still. And while there is so much that is evil within us, no doubt it is appointed us to live in a world of many temptations: full of occasions to stumble and turn aside; full of enticements congenial to the evil within; full of testing times that will bring out the foolishness, the wraths and envies, the self-conceits, all the bitterness of sin that is latent in the heart, and that will spring into manifest being with opportunity. Now it is a miserable thing to think that the day never dawns on which each of us may not make a fool of himself in everybody's eyes but his own: and more miserable to think, as we ought to think, of possible depths of danger, sorrow, shame. And the best intentions,—yes, and the most earnest prayers, will not make quite sure that such shall not be. You have been angry with yourselves for your undevout spirit and wandering thoughts in your prayers,—yet felt you could not stop these evil things. You know you ought to make up your mind, and far more manfully stand by your Christian profession and act up to your Christian convictions: but you find you cannot do this as you desire. Every now and then, wakening up from the spiritual lethargy that steals upon us, you recognise with a start how far you are, in twenty ways, from being what you ought to be,—in temper, speech, aspiration, conduct: you determine to be better,—or to see about being better: then you go on just the

same. No doubt at all, in all truly honest endeavours to put down sin and reach after greater holiness, the Blessed Spirit helps: but still, unless with those in whom wonderful natural goodness and purity go along with very special measures of God's grace, there is a weary conflict: a long-lasting one: often mortifying and humbling defeat. Sometimes, when we have done our very best, it pleases God to let us fail, and be disappointed, at our communion seasons, and our common worship in His house: no doubt all this comes sometimes of physical reasons: yet the disappointment, the blank, sorrowful disheartening, are not the less. Spiritually, as otherwise, we need much taking-down; and so we get it: Not by any other means can we be clothed with humility as we ought to be. And doubtless it is a good fight, the fight of faith. Yet it is painful, and perilous: and we shall be very thankful when the strife is well past, and only peace and purity remain. Wherefore, though with a fainting heart sometimes in the thought of the dark river that runs between us and it, we declare plainly that we seek a country, which is not on this side the grave.

A third reason why we may humbly acquiesce in God's purpose to call us in His time from this life, is, that our knowledge and powers, here confined and imperfect, must be glorified and perfected in a higher state of being.

You can easily see that in thinking of such a subject as mine this morning in a short discourse, it is but a mere sketch of great part of the subject which is possible. And though there is no limit to what may be said under this head, either by the philosophic theologian or the simple expounder of that which is revealed, I pass it by as of lesser real interest to most of us; and as not unlikely to lead into tracks of speculation more curious than useful. To say the truth, I do not believe that, unless to exceptional minds here and there, there is much attraction in these views of the better life, even if we had more reliable information than we have as to their soundness. And I go on to what is certain, and to what every one can understand, when I say that a fourth reason why the believer would not live always in this world, is that while here he is separated, absolutely and completely, from many who are very dear. And Heaven is the only place, now, where all that are dear to most of us can ever meet together. You may go to them, but they will not return to you.

Now, I do not know a matter as to which it is more difficult to speak fittingly. We have arrived at a field of thought which has been beaten bare by speakers and writers beyond number: and in most memories and hearts there are such solemn remembrances and feelings latent, yet capable of being awakened by even a rude and unskilful touch, that the most unworthy means, the poorest collection of stock phrases about

the awful reality of the separation made by death, and about the hope of meeting where there is no parting, will in many cases touch as no wisdom or eloquence could on another topic: touch in a fashion and a degree for which the rude meddler with the most sacred and intimate concerns of our hearts is entitled to not the slightest credit. I wish to avoid all that; and to speak calmly and soberly on this solemn subject.

Doubtless you know, that such as have seen those very dear die, pass through very varied experience: sometimes rebelliously refusing to acquiese in God's will: sometimes able to flee to that refuge of the heart-broken in all ages, the simple Thy will be done: sometimes feeling so deeply how holy, happy, and safe with Jesus those are who are gone, that they would not wish them back again. So with the feeling of the bereaved as to themselves. No doubt the sense has sometimes been, that they could willingly and instantly turn the back upon this life, if they might only see the face and hear the voice again whose removal took all the sunshine from this world: perhaps the very little face that made a blank so large,—and you never knew how much it was in the house, till it was gone. Sometimes, moiling away in the tasks of life, faith grows so weak and the heart so worldly, that there is little real sense of the happy being of those gone, or wish to meet them more. But, even after the first grief has passed away, times

come to many wherein it is felt that the ties are not here, but in the other world: wherein this is calmly felt, by hearts in which the capacity of strong emotion is out-worn. Some may remember that beautiful account given us by a writer little used to such descriptions, of an aged woman who in the last days of her life was so anxious to see again a little child many years taken, that she was only eager to be gone: never thinking of how the little face might be changed in all these years; nor how wise and mighty the little child might by this time have grown in the wisdom of a better world. And though I shrink from speaking publicly of what I have come to know in my ministerial duty, it cannot do harm to any now to say, that I well knew a very aged man, a man burdened with a life of nearly a century, who very many times told me how he had outlived all he cared for: that they were all gone, the brothers and sisters of youth, as he humbly trusted, to the Father's House above, and he felt alone here amid a new generation: and that his sober, daily wish was, that it might please God soon to take him where he would see them again: especially that he might see again his little sister,—the little sister that staid in his memory always the bright little girl,—whom he had not seen for more than ninety years. *He* would not have lived alway: Anything but that: and apart from all unreal sentimentalism, even so is it with many more. Even if there be many ties here, and much to be thankful for: even

though willing thankfully to wait God's good time; we could not make up our mind never to see again the first faces we remember, the kindest we ever knew: those to whom it was the bitterness of death to leave us behind them. As we live on through the years of life, the ties to this world grow fewer, and the ties to the other grow many: most of those who were dear come to be gathered there. Wherefore we will wait our appointed time: we hope to be allowed to do our work: but we shall oftentimes remember how the Family is in heaven and earth; and not desire always to live where we are parted from the best of it. Changed, greatly changed, those who have gone before must be: but the very same beings still; and where changed, changed only for the better. And, forasmuch as the kind affections which bound them to us when in this life were the very best things in them, and the things in which the most of God's Image lingered,—these, assuredly, will be unchanged, save that they will be far warmer and deeper.

And so, at last, we come to the great essential attraction of the better world: the best and strongest reason by far why the believer should, humbly and earnestly, take for his own these words of my text. By the necessity of our spiritual being, we never can be right, never satisfied, never truly at rest and content, till we are with our Saviour. Everything else can do no more than pacify the craving nature within us for

a little while: it is a perfectly assured fact that the soul of man cannot find its satisfying portion anywhere save in God. Now, only above can we "see the King in His beauty;" and be entirely content in that Beatific Vision. Our Blessed Redeemer is there: and imperfectly as we may feel it in our hearts, still we know it as a fact beyond all question, that if we were with Him, it would be well with us. And to live always in this world would be in a true sense separation from Him. Present in the body is absent from the Lord. And to depart and be with Christ is far better. I grant you, that when we look about us, and look in upon ourselves, our souls so worldly, so void of spiritual elevation, so careful and troubled about a thousand petty little things, and with so little true desire and longing after God, thirsting for Him as a thirsty land for the gracious rain,—all this sometimes seems very unreal. Even the best believers among us must bitterly lament that, many days, there is such an absence of anything like thirsting after God. Yet we know that it is a test of our spiritual condition if in some degree we can take it in, that the essential element in the happiness of Heaven,—the thing that makes it sure that the soul entering Heaven will be able to say for the very first time since the burden of conscious life was laid on it, Now I am perfectly happy,—is, that in Heaven blest souls are "for ever with the Lord." The things we have already thought of are all well: but it is not freedom from worldly

sorrow,—not even deliverance from sin,—not ennobled powers,—not happy meetings where partings are unknown,—though all these are well,—not these that make the Heaven which the gospel holds out to man's hopes! It is our Saviour Himself Who can give us rest; rest that is complete, and that leaves nothing more to be longed for.

It is enough now to mention this great truth briefly: for I have many times pressed it upon you before; and sought to explain it at length, in so far as we can explain it.

Well, thinking of it, do we feel that we do not care for that Heaven; that it is not the thing we want at all? If we feel *that*, let us honestly say it. But then what need there is that we be vitally changed,—made indeed new creatures; if while we remain what we are we are such, that the Christian Heaven would not make us happy! For then there is no place in this Universe that can make us so. If we have no relish for this stream of bliss, then there is no stream at which we can drink at all. Broken cisterns are all else; or even if they satisfy for a little, yet whosoever drinks of them shall thirst again. Only in one place is there the living water, of which whoso drinks shall thirst no more. And if we do not now care for *that*, what can we do but pray the Holy Spirit so to renew us, so to sanctify us, that we may come to know it for what it is indeed; and to see the Saviour to be our all in all!

And now, looking back on all that has been said this morning towards the weighing of the two lives, the present and the future, how does it all affect us? I dare say the real feeling of many is, Well, all that is quite true; yet we lean to the warm precincts of the cheerful clay. Heaven is far better than this: yet we should like to stay here as long as we can. Let not the feeling be blamed. It has pleased God, for wise reasons, to implant in us this clinging to the mortal life: and perhaps there is deeper meaning than that which first meets us in the words of Scripture, "The earth He hath given to the children of men." For to *that* our natural tendencies all gravitate; and only grace from above, and vivid faith, can give us, even in a lowly degree, the victory that overcometh the world. But it is good to see, what surely to-day we have seen, plainly how we ought to feel; even if we know we cannot feel so, save in temporary seasons of special elevation. And though we have sought, in this discourse, to weigh the seen and unseen quietly and calmly, we may well wish that it might be vouchsafed us to catch some humble measure of that longing for the Better Country which has been reached by the best of the Race:—that longing for the Golden City, the New Jerusalem, where strangers and pilgrims in this world are at Home at last. Little we know of it, even after all that is written: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love

Him." Doubtless it is well that it be so. Yet we may fitly ask that we may be delivered from our own doubts and fears.

"O could we make our doubts remove,—
These gloomy doubts that rise;—
And see the Canaan that we love,
With unbeclouded eyes:

"Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
Should fright us from the shore!"

THE END.

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